

CASTELNEAU;

THE ANCIENT REGIME.

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CHAPTER I.

In a low-roofed room, on the seventh story of a house in one of the back streets of the city of Paris, and in the year 17—, sat a man habited as an artizan, and bearing in his whole appearance the signs and tokens of a person in the lowest ranks of life. His dress was soiled and dirty, his face and hands not very clean, his sleeves were tucked up nearly to the elbows, and a large leathern apron, which once had been white, hung from his neck, and was girded round his middle. In form he was a powerful man, with broad shoulders, a deep chest, and a sinewy arm; and his countenance was fine, though not exactly handsome, with a frank and free, yet thoughtful expression, a fine open brow, with a look of shrewd good sense and some careless humour. In height, he stood well nigh six feet, and in age might have been about seven or eight-and-twenty years.

In the centre of the room, which was large, though, as we have said, low in the roof, was a table covered with various implements used by the man in pursuit of his trade. There were two lamps, one of which was of a very peculiar form, standing together in the centre of a sort of tray; and beside them lay a multitude of pincers, of all sizes and sizes, several small files, numerous little coils of gold and silver wire, one or two small crucibles and ladles, a watch-glass half-full of fine oil, and a blow-pipe. All these signs and circumstances, to the eye of the initiated, would have revealed at once that the man was a filigree-worker—a trade then much followed in the French capital, though it was the jewellers and great goldsmiths who swallowed up the principal part of its profits, leaving little but bare subsistence and all the labour to those who produced the various beautiful little ornaments which decorated the toilet-table of every fine lady in those days.

The man, at the moment the reader entered his room, was occupied in the pursuit of his calling. From a soiled sheet of paper before him, covered all over with tracings of the most beautiful arabesques that it was possible to conceive, he was imitating, with the greatest nicety and delicacy, in silver, a small basket, representing the cup of Lotus. Now he plied with the utmost rapidity a small pair of pincers; now he used the file to remove any little irregularity; now, by the use of the blow-pipe, he fixed the numerous threads and filaments together, at places where the juncture could scarcely be perceived. Then, when he had done a certain

portion, he paused, looked at it, and seemed to admire his own work.

At length, as the slipper-worker was thus proceeding, a slight noise from the other side of the room, a mere rustle, as it were, caught the quick ear of the Parisian artisan, and, starting up from his stool, he laid down the pincers and the little basket, and moving with a quiet step across the room, peeped into a cradle which stood within a few feet of the fire-place.

There lay as beautiful an infant as ever was seen: a little girl, fine, healthy, rosy, seeming to set at defiance all those sad ills of poverty by which she was evidently surrounded. She had woken up from sleep, and when she saw the well-known face above her, she smiled gladly, and moved her little arms. The artisan gazed upon her for a moment thoughtfully, then shook his head with somewhat of a sigh, saying, "I must not take thee up, for I have nothing to give thee. Sleep, sleep, my baby, for I must work for food;" and rocking the cradle gently with his hand, he endeavoured to lull the child into slumber again by singing to her one of the many little lullabies which were then, and still are, common in France. He had just succeeded, and was still going on for a little to make the conquest of the drowsy god secure, when the door opened, and a good-looking woman, about his own age, entered, and approached him quietly. There was some degree of sorrow, and some degree of timidity in her look; and, indeed, her face was like that of one who brings tidings that will certainly grieve, and may perhaps offend; and yet the good artisan did not seem of a disposition likely to be offended easily, or to be approached with fear, at least by a woman.

"Well, Margiette," he said, in a low voice, "would he give you the money?"

"Not a sou," replied the woman, in a sad tone; "he said that he had never in his life paid a farthing for any work before it was done, and never would."

The man bit his lip, and his brow grew dark for a moment. "Well, well," he said, with a smile, and a sigh the next moment. "The man is not wrong, after all."

"He said something, too," said the woman, "about your not having finished the last *vignette* which he bought of you, at the time you promised it."

"How could I?" exclaimed the man, sharply. "Did I not burn my hand? and could I do fine work with my hand all swelled?"

"But he saw you at the fair at Charenton," said the woman.

"To be sure," answered her husband with a laugh. "I don't walk with my hands, so I could go to Charenton, though I could not work. But you watch the child, Margiette. I must sit up and work all night, and all day to-morrow. I can get the basket finished before seven to-morrow. It is only for the child I care; what can be done for it? Hark ye, Margiette, take that lamp I am not using to the *rendezvous*, and see what she will give you for it. The poor babe must have something to eat, and you, too, my Margiette. I can do very well without."

The woman had still continued to gaze in his face with a timid look, as if she had something to say which she was half afraid of

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uttering, but she now answered, "I have got something for the child, Pierre, here in my basket."

"How, how?" demanded the man, somewhat sharply. "How did you get it?"

"Nay, do not be angry. I would not have taken it, Pierre; but for the child. There were three gentlemen in Monsieur Fiteau's shop, changing some gold and buying some lace; and one of them, an abbe, seeing me well nigh inclined to weep when Fiteau refused me the money, began to ask me questions; and I told him that I should not care about the matter, for that my husband could soon get the work done, but that there was a child, and a child's hunger would not wait. Upon which he offered me some money. I would only take half a livre, for I thought you would be angry; but as I came along, I bought this little loaf and some milk for the child; and now," she added, "here are five sous more: if you will let me I will go and buy something for your supper."

"No," said the husband, "no. You did very right, good wife, to take the money for the child, but I cannot eat the bread of charity while I can work. Make something for the little one and for yourself. I can do very well without till to-morrow."

The woman declared that she would not taste anything if he did not; and, as usual, by persevering she gained her point. They divided the bread into three portions, reserved one, together with the milk, against the child's waking, and each took another. The woman ate hers with calm and quiet resignation; but the man swallowed two or three mouthfuls with difficulty, and then, putting down the crust upon the table, burst into tears, exclaiming, "This is the first time I have eaten the bread of charity! Oh! may it be the last!"

Almost as she spoke, there was a knock at the chamber door, a hand laid upon the latch thereof, and a stranger entered the room. He was dressed in the habit of an abbe, which was, in some degree, clerical, and distinguished from the rest of the world those personages who had taken what are called the first vows, which, in fact, bound them to nothing. These vows were continually renounced at pleasure; and even while they remained in force, they did not restrain the person who had taken them from mingling with the full current of worldly things, enjoying all the pleasures, and but too often sharing in all the vices, of society. Abbés were prevented, indeed, from marrying, till they had formally cast off those vows; but this restriction was of course only an occasion for additional licentiousness; so that it became a common saying, in regard to any one who had a numerous family, "He has as many children as an abbe."

The person who entered might be five or six-and-thirty, and was a fine, powerful man, though the countenance was somewhat pale and sallow, and the eyes were near together, though fine; white-curl about the lip denoted that there was some bitterness of spirit within, either from disappointment, or a turn of mind naturally sarcastic.

There is, perhaps, as much of what we may call expression in a man's carriage, and particularly in his step, as there is in his countenance; and the step of the abbe was very peculiar. It was slow and noiseless, but firm and fixed. Though his shoulders were not

found, his head bent a little forward, and his full dark eyes, when resting on any object, remained half open, without the slightest wandering or movement. Though keen in themselves, no motion betrayed the secrets of the heart: they seemed full of inquiry, but answered nothing.

I mean not, by any means, to say that his countenance was without expression, for it had much peculiar character of its own; though the expression varied only according to his will, and not according to his emotions. On the present occasion, his lip bore a benign and chastened smile; and though he entered with his broad-brimmed hat on, he removed it immediately as he advanced towards the table. The filigree-worker and his wife both rose; and the woman dropped a low courtesy, while her husband fixed his eyes with an inquiring, and even somewhat stern glance upon the stranger, and then suddenly turned and looked for a moment towards the dying embers of their small fire, till he wiped away all traces of the late emotion from his face.

"I have been inquiring into your situation, my good lady, since I saw you," said the abbe, "and from the account which even that hard-hearted old usurer Fiteau gives of you and your husband, I have become interested in you, and wish to know if I can serve you."

The woman hesitated, and Pierre himself turned round and remained silent for a single minute, gazing on the stranger with a curious and somewhat doubtful smile. At length he answered, "We have much to thank you for already, sir; and it is an easy thing to serve people so poor as we are."

"Not always," answered the abbe, without a change of countenance: "each person in this world has his particular views, and I already know that you have yours."

"How so, sir?" said the man, again gazing on him eagerly; "have I ever seen you before?"

"Not that I know of, my good friend," replied the abbe, with a smile; "but your question is easily answered. There are about ten men in Paris under the king, who, if I had offered them half a dozen of livres, would have refused to take them. Now, some twenty minutes ago, I offered your wife here, when I saw she was in distress, a handful of the change I had just received. She contented herself with half a livre, and when I urged her to take more, said that her husband would be angry if she did. Now, have I not reason to say that you have your own peculiar views? But, to put all such things aside, tell me if I can serve you, and how."

"Only, sir, I believe, by ordering some of these trinkets from me," replied the man, in a tone considerably softened, and he pointed to the basket he was working.

The abbe took it up and examined it. "It is very beautiful," he said: "come, I will buy this of you, and pay you for it now, though I, alas!" he added, "have neither wife nor children to please with such gauds. What is the price of it?"

"Nay, sir, I cannot sell you that," replied the man: "it is promised to Monsieur Fiteau, but I can soon work you another exactly like it."

"You can work him another," replied the abbe, somewhat sharply. "Why should I wait, who am willing to befriend you, and he not, who will do nothing for you?"

"Because I have promised it to him, sir," replied the man, simply, "and I cannot break my word."

"You are right," answered the abbe: "I applaud your honesty, and you shall work me another. What may the price be, my good friend?"

"Nay, sir, I hardly know," replied the filigree-worker. "Monsieur Fiteau pays me five livres for my labour, and finds the silver, but what he charges I cannot tell."

The stranger took up the basket, and examined it with a thoughtful air, murmuring as if to himself, "The usurer! What may the silver be worth?"

"Some six or seven livres when spun into wire," replied the man.

"And he gives you five," rejoined the abbe, "taking forty for himself. Out upon it! Here, my friend, here are ten livres to begin with: when you bring me the basket done, I will give you twenty more, and then I shall have the trinket at about one half of the price which this man, Fiteau would charge me for it."

The filigree-worker suffered the abbe to put the money down upon the table without taking it up. He looked at it somewhat wistfully, indeed, and then said, "I should not wish for anything beforehand, but for the sake of the child. We have a hard matter to support ourselves, sir, and, to say the truth, the poor babe is sometimes sadly pinched. I feared this night that I should be obliged to sell some of my tools, or let the poor babe want till to-morrow night."

"Ay, so your wife told me," replied the abbe, "and it was about that I came hither. Do you love the child very much?"

The man gazed at him with an inquiring look for a moment, ere he replied; but he said at length, "We do love the child much, sir! Can you doubt it?"

"Well, then," rejoined the abbe, "what I have to propose will give you pleasure. I want some object to fix my affections upon in this world. I have many rich benefices, and but few objects of thought or care. You shall give me your child to educate; I will adopt it as my own, and lead it forward unto wealth and high station. What say you—will you consent?"

The proposal was in every respect an extraordinary one; for it must be recollected that the distinctions of classes in France were at that time preserved with the greatest strictness; and though there might have been nothing wonderful at all in a wealthy abbe adopting the child of any poor noble, yet the idea of his selecting an object for adoption from either the class of *roturiers* or artisans could never have presented itself until that moment to the mind of the filigree-worker and his wife. Yet, strange to say, it did not seem to surprise either of them very much.

"Will you give us some time to consider of it?" said the man bluntly.

"How long would you have?" demanded the abbe.

The filigree-worker thought for a moment, and then required

four days, to which the stranger consented; and after speaking with them for some time longer upon their circumstances and situation, the abbe gave them his address, and left them.

The filigree-worker continued to labour at the basket during the whole night; but though he had made considerable progress before the next morning, the trinket was not yet completed when the daylight began to peep in at the high window. As soon as day did appear, however, Pierre rose from his labour, washed his face and hands clean, cast away his working apron and jacket, and put on his holyday coat. He then took five out of the ten livres which the abbe had given him; woke his wife, who had gone to bed, with a kiss; and telling her that he was about to set out, but would be back certainly at the end of the three days, he descended the long narrow staircase of the house, and issued forth into the street.

The artisan plodded onward with a quick step and a resolute face through the gates of Paris and the suburbs, past St. Denis, Beconen, and Luzarches, till he reached Chantilly, towards the hour of four in the afternoon. It was a long walk: the road was dusty, and the filigree-worker paused for an hour to get some food, and to rest himself; but at the end of that time he recommenced his journey, proceeding by Creil, till he came to the pleasant village of Cauffry under Liancourt, where he stopped for the night. Early in the following morning he went on again, through the rich and beautiful country which surrounds Clermont, amidst hills and valleys, and brooks and fields, till he reached that pretty town, which he seemed to know well, for he stopped to speak to two or three acquaintances. From more than one he seemed to hear news that grieved him, for his countenance grew sad; and he quickened his pace as he quitted the town, hastening onwards by Fitzjames and Argencieu, where he turned from the high road, and following the course of the Ayre, bent his steps towards the small village and chateau of Argencierre. When he was within about a mile, however, of the village church, he thought he heard some mournful sounds coming up from the valley, and hurrying on towards the side of the hulk he saw winding away from the chateau towards the church the long line of a funeral. Pierre gazed forward for a moment or two with his hands clasped together; then, sitting down upon the bank, he covered his eyes and wept. Whatever was the cause of his emotion, the object of his journey seemed to be accomplished; for, without proceeding any farther, he turned back upon his path, and made the best of his way to Paris.

CHAPTER II.

It was the morning of the fourth day after that which closed with the visit of the abbe to the high chamber of the filigree-worker; and Pierre Morin, with his good wife Margiette, stood together in the middle of the same chamber, the wife holding in her arm the beautiful child we have mentioned, while the husband was performing what appeared to be a very barbarous operation. With one of the small sharp-pointed knives which he employed in his art, the man was tracing two or three small fine lines on the baby's arm,

very high up, so as generally to be covered by the clothes in which she was dressed. The child did not cry or give any sign of pain, but smiled in the man's face, although the next moment the lines which he had drawn, and which were at first colourless, took the form of a Maltese cross, and became distinctly marked by a small portion of blood oozing through each. As soon as the artisan saw this appearance, he took up a box filled with a black powder, and rubbed some upon the spot. The application seemed to make the wound smart, for the little girl now began to cry; but was soon pacified again, the man kissing her affectionately, and saying, "It is for thine own good, *petiotte*. Come wife," he continued, "cover that over, and let us take her away. Bless thy sweet eyes, child! it may be long ere I see them again."

The wife took the child in her arms, the man put on his hat, and away they went together, threading the long and crowded streets, till they came into a more airy and pleasant neighbourhood, where, passing along one of the broad quays, they crossed the river by a bridge, and approached the palace of the Luxembourg. In one of the best streets of that quarter, they stopped before a fine old house, the door of which, however, was open, exposing to view the stone staircase within, which was then—as is but too common in the French capital even now—covered with filth of the most disgusting description. Standing in the door-way was a man who might be a tradesman, or who might be the intendant of some gentleman; and Pierre Morin, with a low bow and humble tone, asked if the Abbe de Castelnau lived there.

The man drew a little on one side, as if to let them pass, replying—"*An second*," which may be translated, "Up two pair."

He said no more, and with the same taciturnity Pierre Morin and Margiette began to climb the long and dirty staircase which led to the apartments of the Abbe de Castelnau. It at once became evident to the filigree-worker and his wife, that the abbe was in what was and is called "*chambres garnies*," or furnished apartments. Now such was a state of life which, in that day, except under particular circumstances, implied a much less degree of respectability than that which was termed being *dans ses meubles*, or in a house of one's own; for it generally happened, with all people of station in the city, that they either had their own hotel, their own apartments and furniture, or apartments lent to them by some of their wealthier relations, who resided in those large mansions which all the principal nobility then maintained in Paris. Another thing, also, was remarkable, which was, that a person of the appearance and seeming wealth of the Abbe de Castelnau should choose that quarter of the city; for, although the houses in the neighbourhood of the Luxembourg were far better than in the vicinity of the Palais Royal, yet fashion said that the latter were to be preferred; and therefore two rooms and an ante-chamber in the Rue St. Honoré cost double the sum of a mansion near the Luxembourg.

Nevertheless, Pierre Morin and his wife, although the good artisan was aware of all these particulars, marched steadily up the stairs, and stopping at a door on the second floor, knocked boldly for admission. A lackey in a grey livery let them in, and with

scarcely a word of inquiry, conducted them to the presence of his master, who was seated, as was the custom in those days, in his bed-chamber. When they entered the room, the abbe raised his calm, quiet eyes towards them, without the slightest expression either of pleasure or surprise.

"Well, my friend," he said, "I learn your determination from seeing the child; but you should have given me notice. I am not quite prepared."

He advanced as he spoke, and caressed the little girl, who seemed in no degree dismayed by the face of the stranger; but, on the contrary, laughed with infant glee at the sight of his dazzling white teeth, which were displayed somewhat more than usual, as he played with the young being before him; and, at length, when he took her in his arms, though he held her with no very dexterous hand, she showed no sign of fear, but looked happy and contented. The abbe smiled with a brighter expression of countenance than usual, saying at the same time, "Perhaps it may be so!"

What he meant, neither Pierre Morin nor his wife understood; but there was much shrewd common sense in the breast of the artisan; and after suffering the abbe to amuse himself with the child for a minute, he said, "We have brought her here, sir, at your request, and though we may grieve to part with her, we will leave her to your care, upon one condition."

"Ha!" said the abbe, "a condition! what may that be?"

"Only this, sir," answered Pierre Morin, "that you shall promise me in writing to breed her up well and honourably, and to give her a marriage portion according to the state in which you place her."

The abbe smiled with one of his cold, calm looks, and replied—"You are a philosopher, my friend; but what you ask is right and just, and I will content you. Can you write?"

"Oh! yes, sir," replied the man: "I who live in the garret can write better than some that live lower."

"Well, then," answered the abbe, "go to that table, and put down exactly what you wish me to promise, while I talk to your wife about what is needful for the child herself."

The artisan did as he was bid; and the abbe made many an inquiry of good Marguerite, which showed that he had thought much on all the points connected with the new task he was about to undertake. The clothing, the food, the habits of the child, were all investigated; and after speaking for some time to the artisan's wife, he called to his servant, and bade him seek a person whom he called Domine.

By the time he had given this order, the filigree-worker had completed his task, and the abbe read, with a smile, the paper he had drawn up. "That will scarcely do," he said; "but I will put it in other language;" and he then wrote down:—"I, Ferdinand de Castelnau, acknowledge having received from the hands of Pierre Morin, his daughter ———, for the purpose of educating her as I would my own child; and I promise him hereby to give her as honourable and good an education, and as ample a dowry when she marries, as if she were in reality and truth my own daughter. What is her name?" demanded the abbe when he had concluded writing.

"Annette, sir," replied the artisan; "Annette, her name is Annette."

The abbe then filled up the blank which had been left in the paper, and handed it to Pierre Morin, asking if it met his views. The artisan read it carefully, and expressed himself satisfied; but added, "You will let us see her sometimes, sir?"

"I will never refuse you when you apply," replied the abbe; "but, of course, your applications will not be too often. Your regard for her will best show itself both in suffering me to think of her as if she were my own child, and allowing her to think of me as if I were her father."

As he spoke, the servant in grey entered the room again, bringing with him an extremely neat, and respectable-looking woman, apparently somewhat past her fiftieth year. The abbe held up his finger to Pierre Morin, and made a similar sign to his wife, saying, "Not a word. This is the child I spoke of to Donnine. Take her from this good woman; you are hereafter her *bonne*. Show her all kindness, and try to make her happy."

"Oh! that I will, right soon," replied the good woman, who was a gay little withered Picard. "I will make her happy enough. Come to me, my darling."

Thus saying, she took the little girl from the arms of poor Margiette, who kissed the child again and again, and could not refrain from a natural tear or two. The abbe then signed the paper he had written, and gave it to the artisan, whom he beckoned into the ante-chamber with his wife, and then offered them some money. The man put it away, however, with the back of his hand, saying, in a tone of indignation, "I do not sell the child, sir." He then walked towards the door, paused for a moment, called to his wife to come, for she had lingered to say a word or two more, then left the abbe with his new charge.

CHAPTER III.

THE scene which we have just contemplated took place on Monday, the 20th of March, in the year we have mentioned. As soon as the filigree-worker and his wife had left the apartment, the Abbe de Castelneau returned to the room in which he had left the child with the good woman Donnine. They both gazed into the face of the child for a moment or two in silence, and then the abbe inquired, "What think you, Donnine?"

"I do not know what to think, my son," replied the good nurse; "but I am sure, whatever you do is right. However, lest there should arise any doubt in the reader's mind as to who Donnine was, from the fact of her calling the abbe "my son," we shall proceed to explain a little more of her history.

From her very early youth, Donnine had been *soubrette* of the Abbe de Castelneau's mother, and was really a good and excellent girl. The lady, not long after her marriage into the family of Castelneau had promoted a union between her pretty attendant Donnine and the old *sommelier*, or butler, of her husband's elder brother, the Count de Castelneau. The butler unadvisedly left the family of

his master, in the hope of making a fortune in the good city of Paris. Those were the days of the regency and of mad speculations. The poor brother, with his little wealth, got entangled with the financiers and gamblers of the capital, ruined himself and his family, and to avoid misery in one world, flew to meet the judgment of another. Poor Donnine, left penniless, and with a prospect of not having another to support as well as herself, sought out her former mistress in the south, and was treated by Madame de Castelneau with very great kindness, that lady being then, like herself, on the very eve of child-birth. The infant to which Donnine gave birth, expired within a few hours after its eyes had first opened upon the light of this world, while the son which was born to her mistress proved strong and healthy; and Donnine once more entered the family in which she had been first received as a servant, returning to it in the humbler, but more important post of a wet-nurse. Thus, the Abbe de Castelneau, was, in fact, her foster-son; and whatever might be his faults or errors, and they were, alas! very many, to her he had always shown undeviating kindness; and in good or evil fortune—for very many vicissitudes had befallen him—he had always retained Donnine in his household, and had always attended to her wants and wishes.

She, too, on her part, combined, in her regard for her foster-son, all the affection of a mother, and the admiration of an attached dependant. She was by no means without good sense, quickness, and activity of thought. On all ordinary occasions, she could judge of right and wrong as acutely as any one; but the moment the Abbe de Castelneau was interested, a sort of film seemed to fall over her eyes, which prevented her viewing objects in their natural light, and everything that he did seemed to be excellent, admirable, and just.

The child very soon began to find that she was in the hands of strangers, and that those she loved had left her. A few tears were shed, but she was speedily soothed; and being of a gay, sweet disposition, with full health, and with no corporeal irritation, the drops were ere long dried again and, laid upon the floor, she amused herself for nearly an hour by clutching at a cross and rosary which the abbe placed just beyond her reach. It was a curious sight to see—the beautiful child thus engaged, and displaying a thousand infant graces in her efforts to reach the object before her, and the calm, thoughtful man, with his full, grave eyes, watching her with a look of interest such as he seldom displayed, and every now and then bursting into unwonted laughter, as he drew the rosary a little farther away, just at the moment she was about to seize it.

During all this time the child and the abbe were left alone together; for, after a brief consultation between him and Donnine, the nurse had gone forth to seek other and better clothing for the child; that which had been brought by the filigree-worker's wife being somewhat scanty in quantity, and very anomalous, indeed, in quality. Some of the articles of her dress were as coarse as it was possible to see; but it is to be remarked that these were chiefly the outward garments, for the inner ones were fine and costly.

We must follow the good woman, however, to the place where such objects as she then wanted were to be found more readily.

than anywhere else in the French capital. Strange as it may seem, this was at the place of public execution in the city of Paris, called the *Place de Grève*; but it must be remarked that no legal slaughter was permitted to take place there on Monday; and on that day was held, every week, a general sort of fair, called the *Foire du Saint Esprit*, where every article of clothing—in general second-hand, but sometimes also new—was to be found spread out for purchase, in the very spot where the bloody arm of the law at other times exercised its power. I cannot better describe this curious scene than in the words of an author who lived in those very days, and who, speaking of this place, says:—"There the wives of the lesser shopkeepers, and other very economical women, go to buy their caps, gowns, cassocks, and even shoes, ready made. There, too, the informers look out for the pickpockets and the inferior sorts of thieves, who come thither to sell the handkerchiefs, napkins, and other things they have stolen. These men are there apprehended, as well as those who come to that place itself with similar views of plunder; for it would seem that even that spot (the *Place de Grève*) is not capable of inspiring them with any very prudent reflections. One would imagine, that this fair with the feminine stripping of a whole province, or the pillage of a nation of Amazons. Petticoats, bustles, dressing-gowns, are scattered about in piles, from which one may choose at leisure; and here the robe of a president's wife is bought by a procuress, and a *grisette* puts on the cap of a marchioness's waiting-woman. Here they absolutely dress themselves in public, and we shall soon see them changing their under garments in this place. The buyer neither knows nor cares whence come the stays for which she bargains; and the most innocent poor girl, even under her mother's eye, puts on those in which, on the preceding evening, danced the licentious woman of the opera. Everything seems purified by the sale, or by the inventory taken after death! As it is women who buy here, and women who sell, the sharpness is pretty equal on both sides, and one hears afar the contention of eager and discontented voices. Viewed near, the scene is more curious still; for when women contemplate female decorations there is something very peculiar to be seen in the physiognomy. In the evening at this mass of goods and chattel is carried away as if by enchantment, and there remains not a rag. But this inexhaustible magazine will re-appear on Monday next, without fail."

In the great republic of the *Foire du Saint Esprit*, there were various grades and classes; some stalls much superior and more aristocratic than others, some who directed, and some who followed their guidance, as was the case in the republic of ancient Rome, and with every other republic that ever was or ever will be; for, alack-and-well-a-day! what is the senator but the peer? what consuls, dictators, presidents, but kings? only that, as poor Ophelia has it, they "wear their rue with a difference." All things must have their grades; all lands must see some rule, and others obey; all people divide themselves into those who follow, and those who lead. It is but, in general, a difference of the duration of command; and whether it be that each individual holds his station by the month, or the year, or the seventy years, or only for a day, as was

the case in the *Noire du Saint Esprit*, matters but little, surely, when life itself is but an hour. It is wonderful what vast changes we make in names, while realities continue the same.

To return, however, from such digression: there were, as I have said, various classes amongst the booths, and an aristocracy even in the sellers of old clothes. It was to one of the most dignified, lady, of the saleswomen, who, with a cap as white as snow, a gown of taffeta unseiled, and not ruffled, and beautiful dumy pockets pendent on either side, that the good nurse Donnine addressed herself for the purchase of all the little articles of clothing that were required for the child Annette. There was much chaffering and bargaining; and the woman failed not to declare to her customer that not one of the articles which she sold her, had ever been worn by any one. This thing had been made for the wife of a counsellor whose child had been still-born; that had been expressly ordered by the capricious Marquise of —, who, when she saw it, changed her mind, and would not have it; the other had been destined for the child of the great banker, but had been found somewhat too small.

"And that beautiful gown of brocade," said Donnine, pointing to one which the saleswoman kept near her, as if she were afraid of its touching any thing else—"what is the price of that?"

"Ah! my good woman," replied the other, shaking her head, "that's for no one but the mistress of a financier, or for one of our great actresses to perform the part of Esther or Judith in, I can warrant you. Why, I paid three louis and a half for that gown this morning. The *femme de chambre* told me that it was made for Mademoiselle D'Argence, when she was going to be married to the young Count of Castelnau, the old Count's son, you know, and it has never been worn."

"Why, how did that fall out?" demanded Donnine.

"Why, the two fathers quarrelled," said the other, "upon some old grudge: and the young Count was sent away to join the army on the Rhine, and was killed but ten days after he arrived."

"Well, for all that," said Donnine, "I would not have sold my wedding gown if I had been the lady."

"Ay, but she took on, and died," replied the saleswoman; and the clothes, then, of course, fell to her maid."

To this last speech Donnine made no reply; but gathering up what she had bought into a small bundle, she paid for the whole, and walked away, but did not proceed immediately to the house from which she had come. On the contrary, indeed, she turned her steps in a direction the most opposite, and, passing the Palais Royal, took her way through a street which has since changed its name more than once. It was then called the Rue de Boutteville; and about half way up was a large house, with a man dressed in somewhat of a military costume, but in clothes which denoted deep mourning, standing under the arch of the *porte cochère*. Over his shoulder he wore an immense broad belt, which was fringed with black, and in it hung a peculiar sort of sword, only worn by that class of people who acted the part of porters at the doors of gentlemen's houses in Paris, and were known by the name of *Swiss*, let them come from what country they would. In his hand, the person

we have mentioned—who was a portly man, with large limbs and rounded stomach—bore a tall ebony staff of great thickness, and with a gilded globe at the top, which now, however, was covered with black crape. As he saw Donnine approach, his face relaxed from its solemnity into a half-smile, and he pulled off his cocked hat with great politeness.

"*Adieu monsieur,*" said Donnine, pausing for a moment near the door, "I have heard the sad news! *Ma mademoiselle is dead, poor thing!*"

"Alas! yes, *madam,*" replied the Swiss, in a tone of lamentation. "She was a sweet young lady. We buried her yesterday morning, poor thing! and a fine sight it was to see. We came away directly after the funeral, for my lord and my other young lady could not bear the chateau afterwards. But here come some of the servants, and I must not be seen speaking to any of your family, you know, however I may personally regret that such disunion should prevail."

With this solemn and courteous sentence, the porter drew himself somewhat back; and Donnine, making him a courtesy, which he returned by a profound bow, proceeded on her way, and took the first turning that led towards the Luxembourg.

CHAPTER IV.

WE must now return for a short space of time to our filigree-worker; and, though we do not trace step by step the progress of Pierre Morin through the course of the day which commenced by his visit to the Abbe de Castelneau, we may say that, to him, it was a day of bustle and anxiety; that he was absent from his home during a greater part of the morning, and that consequently he had scarcely any time to labour on the basket, in constructing which we have seen him interrupted in the first chapter of this work. At night he resumed his labours; but, as may be well supposed, all the fatigue he had undergone during that day and those which preceded it, rendered repose absolutely necessary. He grew dull and heavy: the fine working of the silver required attention and care; and, after making several vain efforts to overcome the sleepiness that had fallen upon him, he abandoned the task and went to bed.

On the following morning early, the filigree-worker proceeded with quick steps to the house of the Abbe de Castelneau. Everything externally bore the same appearance as before. The door at the bottom of the stairs was open; and, without stopping to make any inquiries at a small glass-covered apartment shaded by a green curtain, behind which no Parisian eye could doubt the person of a porter was to be found, Pierre Morin ran up the stairs with a quick step, but stood stupified when he saw a large board hung across the door of the abbe's apartments, and, written thereon, the significant intimation: "*Chambres garnies à louer. Parlez au portier.*"*

Still Pierre Morin would not suffer himself to be convinced that the abbe was actually gone. He rang the bell that hung beside the

* Meaning, "Furnished apartments to let. Inquire of the porter."

door of the apartment, and knocked once or twice violently with his hand. No answer was returned, unless it were the hollow echoes of his own blows, which replied, plainly enough, "Here is nothing but emptiness." He then went down and made application at the glass-door we have mentioned, demanding where was the Abbe de Castelneau. The porter replied dryly, that he did not know: how should he?

"If he goes, then?" demanded the filigree-worker.

"To be sure," answered the porter: "he went yesterday evening about three o'clock. He only had the apartments for a week."

The face of Pierre Morin fell as he heard this intelligence; and though by various questions he endeavoured to obtain farther information, all that he could ascertain was, that the abbe had apparently gone into the country, having taken his departure in a *chaise de poste*, the driver of which seemed to know in what direction he was to turn his horses' heads without being told. With this unsatisfactory intelligence, the filigree-worker turned upon his way; but it was an hour or two after this period ere he re-entered his own chamber. He there, however, held a long conference with his wife as to all that had taken place, before he proceeded to resume his work; and yet both seemed better satisfied than might have been expected under such circumstances; doubtless trusting that the child would be well taken care of, though it had been removed in a somewhat strange and suspicious manner. The labour on the basket was then recommenced, and during this night Pierre Morin worked at it without intermission.

It was about five o'clock in the morning when he finished it, and just as he was putting the last concluding touch to the work, the rolling sound of rapid wheels rushing into the court-yard of the house, whose highest and most miserable story the artisan tenanted, told that some gay votary of pleasure and fashion was returning, probably from scenes of vice as well as dissipation, at the hour when the children of industry and want were rising from their hard couch, to begin the heavy passing of a day of toil. It was common in those times for many of the best and most splendid mansions in Paris to be divided amongst all the classes of society, though the arrangement of the tenants, indeed, was very different from that which existed in the social world. Lowest of all, we are told, except the rats and bottles that occupied the cellars, generally lived the proprietor of the house. He might be some avaricious or some decayed nobleman, whose health, purse, or inclination rendered him unwilling to climb even a single flight of stairs. Then came the gay, the luxurious, the fashionable, the man of the court and of society, inhabiting the wide and lofty rooms of the first floor. The *entresol* above gave accommodation to the smart young secretary of some public office, some foreign baron, or some of the numerous counts and princes that swarmed in German and Italian courts. The second floor received the respectable merchant or banker, who had his offices and business in another part of the city; the widow lady, possessing affluence, but not riches; and all that numerous class, by no means the least happy or the least estimable, who are known by the name of *very respectable persons*. Above that, again, on the third, came the highest grade of men of letters, the academician,

the celebrated professor, the philosopher in vogue, the great artist. On the fourth—for there was a fourth, ay, reader, and a fifth, and a sixth, also—were people still at ease, and possessing all the necessities of life; but possessing them not only with the slight inconvenience of daily climbing up long flights of stairs, but often with the serious anxiety of providing for children, for whom fortune had assigned no fund but the labour of a parent. Above these, again, came the poor artist, struggling forward with zeal and industry to make his merit known; the deep-thinking man of science, the result of whose investigations made or saved the fortunes of thousands, without giving him a sou; the moralist, the teacher, the man of letters, who disdained to pander to the bad taste of a licentious public, or to employ the arts of the quack to gain fame, or wealth, or honours. Above these, again, were want, and misery, and destitution; the never-ceasing toil of all the various artists and artisans, the productions of whose hands ornamented the palace, the church, and the saloon; such men, in short, as our filigree-worker, who were brought too closely in contact with the dwellings of wealth, luxury, and vice, not to feel an additional pang, amidst all the miseries of their own station, and to murmur at that social arrangement which allotted to them the whole of the dark side of life, and gave to beings, often less worthy, all that was bright and shiny.

The vices of the higher class of the Parisian people, their intemperance, their debauchery, their infidelity, their contemptible frivolity, were all indulged, enacted, and displayed, under the very same roofs where dwelt misery, penury, and labour; and yet they wondered that there came a Revolution!

Oh! would but man remember that he is but a steward of all he possesses; that his wealth, his honours, his talents, his genius, his influence, are all merely lent to him by the one great Possessor, not alone for his individual benefit, but for the benefit of the whole: would he but remember this, such terrible accounts of the stewardship would not be taken as are often demanded on this earth, by agents that seem little likely to be entrusted with such a commission; and the after-reckoning, too, might be looked for in peace, knowing that it is to be rendered to a mild and merciful Lord.

The filigree-worker cast himself down upon his bed, saying with a smile, "Others have come home to sleep, why should I not rest also?" But though he did take a few hours' repose, he was up and away long before the fevered gamester, whose wheels he had heard, entertained any thought of stirring from his restless couch.

The part of the world, however, towards which Pierre Morin now bent his steps was all busy and stirring with a multitude of people, some animated alone by the hope of gaining that honest daily bread which in those days was with very great difficulty acquired by the lower orders of the Parisian people, but many others instigated by the dark spirit of that most degrading of all demons, Mammoth, to rob the rich of their wealth, and the poor of their labour.

Not far from the great church of Notre Dame, somewhat behind

it, still a little to the right of that building, is a narrow street which has suffered little variation, except inasmuch as the shops, with which it was filled at the time I speak of, are now very much fewer in number than they then were, and are almost entirely devoted to the sale of such ornaments and utensils as are generally appropriated to the church. Sacramental cups and salvers, crosses of all kinds, even the pastoral crook of the bishop, and the pirl itself, are still there displayed; but at the period of my story, every article worked in gold or silver was there to be found; and multitudes of trinkets of all kinds were ranged in the shop-windows, all along a street, every house of which was then the property of a goldsmith or a jeweller. At the corner of this street, in the best and largest shop that it contained, where one might just catch a view of solemn Notre Dame, rising blue and airy over the neighbouring houses, might be daily seen old Gaultier Fiteau, the famous jeweller, goldsmith, and money-changer. He was notorious for wealth, avarice, unscrupulous roguery, and the most delicate and tasteful goldsmith's work in Paris. He was of a harsh and a sour disposition, also, to all who came under his rod, pitiless to the poor, but submissive to the rich, and grasping and eager with all men. He was capricious, too, and would sometimes do a good action as if merely for a change; and the only permanent habit which bore the appearance of virtue in him was that of occasionally endeavouring to interest the rich in favour of the poor, and thus, as it were, to give alms by deputy. It was reported, however, that it was dangerous to trust Monsieur Fiteau with any nation for another, there being a certain oblivious power in his brain, which made him forget to give away anything that he had once received, and, even when reminded of it, enabled him not to recollect the exact amount.

It was to his shop then, that Pierre Morin now hastened, bearing the basket which he had completed during the preceding night. The little shrivelled old man, the ugliness of whose countenance was only increased by an immense bear-skin cap, received the poor filigree-worker with an angry and malevolent scowl. Much was the abuse he poured on the head of the artisan, for the time which he had occupied in producing the basket. He called him an idle and good-for-nothing fellow; declared that he would be brought to beggary by his laziness; and dwelt upon the idea of good Pierre Morin being reduced to utter starvation with the tone and manner of one who would receive from such a sight the utmost glee and satisfaction.

Pierre, who had a large fund of good humour, bore all that the goldsmith said with the most perfect calmness and tranquillity; but when Fiteau asked him, or rather commanded him, to produce another basket exactly similar to the one he brought, in the space of three days, the good artisan, remembering his promise to the Abbe de Castelneau, and that he had received some part of the money in advance, declared that he could not do it; assigning the true reason, that he had such another trinket to finish for a gentleman who had bespoke it.

This reply enraged the goldsmith to the highest possible degree; not so much because he wanted the basket soon, as because he was

made indignant and apprehensive by the very thought of a mere artisan getting any larger share of profit than he chose to assign. He stormed, he raved, he grinned, and he declared that unless Pierre abandoned the work altogether, he would never employ him again, even if he were starving.

Pierre remained firm, however, and thus they parted; the artisan resolving to do nothing else till he had prepared the basket for the abbe, in case it should be required. The abbe did not appear, however, and the basket remained on the filigree-worker's hands. Nevertheless, though it seems strange to say, he contrived to support himself well for nearly a month, without having recourse to Monsieur Fiteau; but the secret was this, that the nobleman on whose estates he was born, and who, seeing him a clever and intelligent youth, had paid the expenses of his education, and enabled him to learn the trade at which he now laboured, chanced to be at Paris about this time; and Pierre having presented himself at his patron's house, though he never mentioned or even hinted at his poverty, either to the gentleman himself or his only surviving daughter, received from each of them a present, which enabled him and his wife to live, for the time we have stated, with all the careless gaiety of French peasants, enjoying the sunshine of the present hour to the very full, and not giving even a thought to the clouds of to-morrow. At the end of the month, however, poverty began daily to present herself under her most painful aspect; and the filigree-worker, had he been one of those who are inclined frequently to ask for assistance, which, indeed, he was not, could not have obtained it in the same quarter, for the nobleman who had befriended him, and his daughter, had left Paris for a distant part of France ten days before.

He sat, then, one evening in April, fireless, supperless, and peniless; and after first gazing in his wife's face with a melancholy look for some time, and then down upon the uncovered table, he started up, exclaiming in a gay tone, "Diable! I will go to old Fiteau!"

Margiette did not try to dissuade him, though she very much feared that his application would prove vain; and, tossing on his hat, with a light step, the buoyancy of which, no poverty could take away, good Pierre Morin proceeded rapidly to the shop of Fiteau, which he feared might be closed before he arrived.

He found the usurious old goldsmith bustling about in his shop, putting away this article and that, and winding up all his affairs for the night. One half of the shop, which looked towards Notre Dame, was closed, and the other partly so, though two or three of the heavy iron-bound shutters were still down, in order that the nice calculator of expenses might not be obliged to light his lamp so long as there was any ray of light left in the sky. A boy of about fourteen years of age, the only assistant of any kind that he kept, and who served for clerk, shopman, porter, and everything else, was aiding his master to the best of his abilities, while a low, irritable growl, on the part of Fiteau, showed that the lad's most zealous exertions were not successful in satisfying his master.

As soon as Pierre Morin entered the shop, Fiteau began upon him in a sharp tone, exclaiming, "Ah! you idle scapegrace, I thought you would soon make your appearance again, expecting

me to employ and assist you, when I have lost more money by your laziness than enough. Here, if you had been working for me, you might have gained half a louis between this time and twelve to-morrow. Here is a gold filigree bracelet to be made for the old Marquise de Pompignan, who goes to Versailles at one o'clock to-morrow, and will not wait a minute."

"Well, give me the wire," said Pierre Morin, "and I will do it before then. It is a mere nothing to work a bracelet; there is not half the labour in it that there is in a watch, such as I wrought last."

"I will not trust you—I will not trust you," replied the goldsmith, "you good-for-nothing fellow. I am just going to send the boy to your companion Launoy, to tell him to come hither and do it. I will not trust you either with the gold or in regard to the time."

The assertion in regard to Launoy, indeed, was altogether false, for that workman had quitted the shop not ten minutes before, loaded with more work than he could possibly accomplish in the time allowed him. All the other workmen usually employed by old Fiteau were also fully occupied; and the thought of losing the order for the bracelet had been lying very heavy at the old miser's heart, when the appearance of Pierre Morin had given him a hope of seeing the work accomplished. Knowing, however, that the good lady for whom it was intended was of a tenacious and irritable disposition, he determined to find some means of guarding against any sort of idleness on the part of the filigree-worker, and he consequently took good care not to show his satisfaction at seeing him again, but continued to abuse him as bitterly as ever.

"I do not want to take the work from Launoy," said Pierre Morin, "if he wants it."

"Oh, no, no," interrupted the old goldsmith, fearful of over-acting his part, "he does not want it; he has plenty of work every day in the week; but it is that I cannot and will not trust to you, you idle vagabond. But come, I will tell you what I will do," he continued after a moment's pause. "Out of pure compassion, and for no other reason in the world, I will give you the work, if you will stay here and do it, and never go out of the little work-room there, till it is done."

"And I am to have half a louis when it is done?" said the filigree-worker. "Is that to be the bargain?"

"Nay, nay," said eight livres," replied the goldsmith; "half a louis is too much."

"Not a whit for gold work," said the filigree-worker, who began to perceive that old Fiteau was somewhat more eager in the business than he pretended to be. "I will have that, or I will go elsewhere. It was what you offered at first, Master Fiteau."

"Well, well, you shall have it," replied the usurer. "Get you in, get you in, and I will lock the door upon you, to guard you against your own bad inclinations: keep you out of temptation. ha, ha!"

"Why, you do not suppose that I would steal all these things of

yours, if you left me here all night?" demanded Pierre Morin, pointing to the jewellery scattered round.

"I don't know, I don't know," answered the goldsmith. "Pretty things to look at, Master Morin—very tempting things—very tempting. I do not know that I might not steal them myself, if they were not my own. Safe, bind, safe find, Master Morin—safe bind, safe find. I never leave any one in my shop when I am not of it. Here is an ounce of wire, and half a pennyweight of Venetian gold, but where is the blowpipe? Oh! here it is in this drawer; the rest of the tools you will find there, and a lamp; there is some charcoal, too, and some crucibles."

Pierre Morin listened with a quiet smile till the old man had done; he then answered, however, "All very good, Master Fiteau; but I must go home and tell my wife before I begin. Why, she would be looking for me in the *Morne* to-morrow morning."

"Nonsense, nonsense," replied the goldsmith; "do you pretend to say that you never stay out at night without her knowing where you are?"

"Never, upon my life!" replied Pierre Morin; "never since we were married to this hour, and that is six years ago, come the Saturday before Martinmas. I promised her I never would, and I always keep my word, Master Fiteau."

"Except when you have work in hand, scapegrace," cried the miser, with a laugh. "But get you in, get you in. I will send the boy to tell your wife where you are. He has some twenty errands to do in the town, and has got to take up a crucifix and two rosaries to a house in the Rue Montmartre, so that he goes by your door."

"Then you must send her a livre to get her some supper, Master Fiteau," said the filigree-worker; "she will want some comfort if I am not there."

It was with considerable difficulty that Monsieur Fiteau was induced to agree to this part of the bargain; but Pierre Morin saw that he had the advantage of his avaricious employer, and he would not go into his place of labour till he had seen the old goldsmith give the livre in the hands of the boy. He made the boy promise to deliver it the first thing, assuring him that he would skin him alive if he did not keep his word. The boy then whistled a few bars of the last song which had been produced upon the Pont Neuf—my French readers will understand what I mean—and walked before the goldsmith through a little back parlour, where Fiteau took his meals during the day, (for he slept in another part of the town, and possessed no portion of this house but the ground-floor), into a small confined work-shop, where was a little furnace well supplied with crucibles, and a table covered with various lamps and manifold kinds of tools. There was some little dispute between Fiteau and his workman as to the quantity

* The place now called the Morgue was known by the above more appropriate name in those days. It may be as well to state, for the benefit of persons not thoroughly acquainted with the topography of Paris, that it is the place where are exposed the corpses of unknown persons found dead, in order that they may be identified by their friends and relations. The writer of these pages has been in it several times, and seldom found it untenanted.

of oil and coal that was necessary; but this being settled, Pierre Morin addressed himself seriously to his work, and Fiteau, creeping out of the room with his usual quiet and stealthy pace, was heard to lock the door behind him, as if he had been the gaoler of a prison.

Pierre Morin went on with the bracelet; but presently finding the room too hot, he jumped upon a table and opened a small high window of about a foot square. He then returned to his work; and with the happy art of abstracting his thoughts from all subjects but that which was immediately before him, he gave himself up to the enjoyment which always proceeds from the practice of an art in which we are skilful, and for which we have a taste.

He was thus deep in the admiration of all the lines and figures he was working in the gold wire, when a sound struck his ear which made him pause for a moment. He resumed his work instantly, for he knew there was no time to spare, but he had scarcely taken another turn when he again listened—started up with a look of surprise and horror—looked to the door—recollected it was fastened—gazed up to the window—saw that it was barred; and then, seizing one of the instruments from the table, darted quickly to the other side of the room, and put his hand on the lock.

CHAPTER V.

LET the reader call to mind the description which we have given of the premises occupied by the goldsmith. There was the outer shop, with a long counter on either side, and a narrow passage between these two: behind that again was the inner shop or little parlour, and from it, through a small door, one entered the workshop, into which Gaultier Fiteau had locked the filigree-worker. All these rooms, except the shop, had windows so strongly barred that no human power could find their way in or out, except by the legitimate entrance; and the shop itself, open during the day, was secured at night by shutters covered with plates of iron. It may be remembered, that when Fiteau shut up the filigree-worker in the inner room, these shutters were principally closed. Two or three, however, were still down at that time; and before the goldsmith suffered his boy to depart upon the numerous errands he had to perform, he made him aid in putting up these cumbrous defences, and fastened them tightly on the inside. The door of the shop did not bear the dignified decoration of plate glass, nor any of those appearances by which shop-doors at present are distinguished from other doors, but was made of solid oak, studded and bound with iron, like the doors of a prison; and strong must have been the hand, or cunning the device, which got it open when once it was closed.

As soon as the goldsmith had seen the shutters completely up he found his way by the faint light which came in through the still open door, to some small sparks of fire that were glimmering on the hearth in the other room: and, lighting a lamp, gathered together all the various articles which the boy was to carry to their several destinations, put them into a closely covered basket, hung

it on the lad's arm, and despatched him on his way, while he himself bustled about his counters and drawers, placing everything in order, and all under lock and key.

When the boy issued forth into the street, knowing well the goldsmith's habits and character, he took care to close with scrupulous exactness the door of the shop behind him, and then, safe from watchful eyes, he paused, looking round him on all sides, and enjoying the first moment of idle relaxation and freedom from the sharp superintendence of a careful and somewhat scolding master.

It was the twilight of an April evening: there was a calm bluish shade in the air, which spoke of repose and peace; the busy labours of the Parisian world were all over; and as the boy looked up the street and down the street, calculating which would be the best and most amusing way to go—though in fact there was little difference between them—he beheld not a creature either to the right hand or to the left, and heard not a sound but distant murmurs from other parts of the city, and the clock of Notre Dame striking seven. During the momentary pause which he made, however, a group of three people came into the street on the left hand; and although there could be very little matter in their appearance to excite the lad's curiosity, yet he turned in that direction as soon as he saw them, and must have passed close by them, had they not slowly crossed over the way in earnest conversation as they came near. The shadiness of the street, and the dark hue of the evening hour, prevented the boy from seeing as clearly who or what they were as he could have wished to do; for he was naturally of an inquiring disposition. One thing he did remark: that they seemed to be three gentlemen of good mien and apparel; and, after giving them a steady and inquisitive glance, the boy passed on. He stopped at the nearest corner, however, to look back; but after a moment's halt, went forward again, and soon reached the more thronged and gay part of Paris, where, by pausing to gaze at everything that attracted his attention, stopping to talk with this person and with that, and employing with considerable success all those means which boys about his age generally use for getting rid of the great adversary, Time, he contrived to loiter away the moments till half-past nine o'clock of the same night.

In the meantime old Fiteau soon brought the work of arrangement to a conclusion, and only remained in the shop to sum up, with his usual care, the loss and gain of the day, which he generally did upon a slate every evening, copying it into a large vellum-covered book, the first thing, on the following morning. This night, however, he was suddenly interrupted, in the midst of his calculations, by a noise, as if some one had laid his hand on the lock of the outer door. The moment he heard it, the old man took a step forward from the other side of the shop, with an eager look and trembling limbs, intending either to lock or bolt the door. But before he could effect that purpose, the entrance of the blue twilight, showed him that it was too late. The appearance of a face that he knew, the moment after, relieved his anxiety and apprehension, although the surprise and alarm which he had at first felt, left his heart beating, and his hand still shaking.

"Ah! monsieur le chevalier," he exclaimed, addressing the per-

courage who entered, and who was a tall, powerful man, with a pale, worn, and somewhat sinister countenance; you surprised and startled me. Did you not know that I never do any business after my door is shut? Did the boy tell you I had not gone home?"

"No, indeed," replied the chevalier, who had been followed into the shop by another person, somewhat less in size, but equally powerful in frame. "We did not see your boy. If he be out, I suppose you have no one who could carry something home for me, were I to buy it?"

"Not I, not I," replied the goldsmith, somewhat impatiently. "Good evening, count," he added, bowing low to the other; and then resuming his reply, he said, "I have no one to send till to-morrow; besides, I never sell by lamp-light, and it is time for me to go home."

"If you never sell, do you buy, my dear Fiteau?" said the man whom he had called count, coming forward, with a dull, unpleasant smile, which had far more of sneering contempt in it than either courtesy or kindness.

"No, no," replied Fiteau, "I neither buy nor sell at this time of night. Come, gentlemen, I must go home. I will talk to you by the way," and he moved a little towards the door. But the other two remained still in the way, and the one called by Fiteau the count, replied with the same cold smile, "No, no, my dear Fiteau, you must not go home till you have done what I want. I am hard pressed for a little money to-night, and you must give me a hundred louis for this snuff-box. You know it well, and the diamonds upon it. If the cards are lucky to-night, I will take it back from you to-morrow, and pay you twenty louis to boot."

"I declare," cried Fiteau, at the first impulse, "I have not a hundred louis in the place." But the moment he had said it, he repented; for there was a sort of haggard and ominous expression about the countenance of his two companions, which gave him some vague alarm in regard to the consequences of offending them; and he likewise knew that the snuff-box was worth much more than the sum required.

"That is a lie, Fiteau," answered the count, the moment the other spoke; "for you know that you made the Abbe de Castelnau pay you five hundred louis, not three hours since, whether he would or not, and well-nigh ruined him, poor fellow."

"I have paid money since, I have paid money since," exclaimed Fiteau: "it was to discharge my own debts I made him pay his. Why did he change his lodging, and hide himself?"

As he spoke, Fiteau remarked the eyes of his two visitors turn towards each other, with a look that he did not at all like; and after a moment's pause, he added, "Well, well, I will see what I have got, I will see what I have got. I may have some ninety louis, if that will do. Let me have the box. The money is in that next room."

The count gave him the box, and the old man turned with a hasty step, towards the little parlour, feeling, if the truth must be told, not for the key of the chest in which his money was kept, but for the key of the room in which Pierre Morin was at work. The moment he passed on thither, the two men who had entered his shop

spoke a few rapid words to each other; the one saying, in a low tone, "Now, chevalier!" and the other replying, "No, you, you!—I will do the rest."

"Shut the door then!" cried the dunt; and, before the poor old goldsmith could reach the entrance of the workshop where Pierre Morin was locked in, a strong arm was thrown round him, a hand put over his mouth, the outer door of the shop closed, and the second villain was also upon him.

There is strength even in despair: the old man dropped the lamp which he carried, and which was instantly extinguished; got his mouth free for a moment, and gave a loud cry for help. Then finding that he could not liberate himself from the arm that held him by a straightforward effort, he slipped down in spite of that strong grasp, avoiding a blow that was aimed at his head by one of the assassins, which hit the other on the breast, and made him still farther relax his hold. All was now darkness, and, under cover thereof, the wretched old man strove to escape to the street door, but he was instantly caught again. Then came the terrible struggle for life or death, the writhing, the striving, the loud and agonized cry, the dull muttered curse, the faint groan, the gasp of anguish and destruction. Both the assassins were upon the ground bending over him, so eager in the terrible deed they were performing, that they knew nothing, heard nothing, but the sounds created by themselves and their victim. Scarcely, however, had the last faint cry passed from the lips of the miserable man, when a sudden light burst into the room, and one of the murderers instinctively started up. Before he was prepared to resist, however, or to act in any way, a tall powerful man was upon him, and he was struck to the ground by the blow of a hammer. The chevalier was upon his feet in a moment, as soon as he saw his companion fall; and, dropping the knife, which was wet with the heart's blood of poor Fiteau, he drew his sword upon Pierre Morin, while the count struggled up again upon his knee. The artisan, unarmed and over-matched, darted past them; but he would not have escaped unhurt, had not the assassin, in lunging at him, stumbled over the prostrate body of the murdered man and fallen, dyeing himself in the gore with which the floor was covered.

Seizing the opportunity, Pierre Morin darted into the outer shop, banged to the door which separated it from the little parlour or counting-house; and though one of the villains pulled strongly from the inside, he succeeded, by a great effort, in keeping it closed with his left hand, till he had turned the key in the lock with his right.

When this was done, the good artisan put his hand to his brow to collect his bewildered thoughts, and then felt his way, with his brain whirling and his breast oppressed, to the door of the shop, which he opened, and went out into the air.

The moment that he stood beyond the threshold, a man wrapped in a dark cloak appeared beside him, demanding eagerly, "What was that cry? Was the old man there? You have not killed him?" Scarcely were the words uttered, when he seemed suddenly to perceive that he was speaking to a stranger, and darted away at full speed.

Pierre Morin stooped to pick something up from off the ground,

and then instantly gave the alarm, shouting loudly for aid, and ringing all the bells of the houses round. A crowd was soon gathered; men and women, porters, lackeys, gentlemen, and merchants, poured forth from their houses, and listened with wondering ears to the tale of the artisan.

The shop of poor Gaultier Fiteau was surrounded by the crowd, and the lieutenant-general of police was sent for; but till he came, Pierre Morin could not prevail upon any one to enter the house, although he represented to the multitude that the old jeweller might not yet be dead: such was the feeling of awe which the population of Paris entertained at that time, towards the police. Very speedily, however, the lieutenant-general appeared in person with manifold officers and flambeaux, and having heard the story of the artisan, he spoke a word or two to one of the persons who accompanied him, and proceeded with his own hand to open the door of the house. A pause took place while the lieutenant, taking a torch in his hand, looked in, but all was vacant and as silent as the grave. The chief officer of police then advanced between the two counters, followed by the rest, without a word being said. He stopped a moment to gaze at a small dark stream of blood, which found its way out from underneath the door between the shop and the parlour, and muttered to himself, "Here is evidence of the deed."

He then unlocked the door and threw it open. The moment he did so, however, two men burst forth, and made a violent effort to break through. The lieutenant-general of police himself was knocked down, and some of those behind him recoiled. But the moment the count and the chevalier saw the exempts, their courage seemed to abandon them, and they were taken in a moment. On examining the room, it was found that the unfortunate goldsmith was quite dead; and, whether it was that the two men, supposing any persons who came to apprehend them would be without lights, fancied they might escape better in the darkness—or whether, as some people imagined, the sight of their own deed was too horrible for them to bear—it is certain that they had put out the lamp which Pierre Morin had left lighted in the workshop, and had thus remained for a considerable length of time, it would appear, in the midst of darkness, with the body of him they had killed lying close beside them.

What had been their sensations?—what had been their thoughts during the interval? Nobody has ever known; but it is evident that they had conferred together, as soon as they found that it was impossible to escape from the scene of their crime, and had arranged the story they were to tell, or rather the account they were to give of the event which had taken place.

As soon as the lieutenant-general of police had raised himself from the ground, on which he had been cast by the furious rush of the two criminals, he ordered them to be removed and kept separate; and, at the same time, after speaking a few words to one of his exempts, he nodded to Pierre Morin, saying, "I will talk with you farther, presently."

The good artisan was somewhat surprised to find the exempt take him by the arm, and lead him away from the scene in which

he thought that the information he had to give might be most particularly required. He was still more surprised, however, to find that he was to be carried to the house of the lieutenant, and shut up in a room by himself, with very little difference between him and the criminals against whom he was to bear witness.

The room in which he was placed, indeed, contained a bed; and for that luxury poor Pierre Morin would have been even more grateful than he was, if he had been thoroughly acquainted with all the transactions which, from time to time, took place in Paris under the paternal care of the police of the French metropolis.

CHAPTER VI.

THE mind of the good filigree-worker was not one to be impressed easily with feelings of apprehension. He thought it very strange and very disagreeable that he who had given the first alarm, who had aided with such effect to seize the murderers, who was the only living witness, in fact, of the crime, should thus be detained in solitude, with the key of the door turned upon him.

With natural lightness of heart, however, he soon forgot the small evils of his situation; and after revolving for some time all the horrible images which the scenes of that night had presented to his eyes, he exclaimed, "*Peste!*" three times, and having thus satisfied the goddess of wonder, he cast himself down upon the bed, and fell sound asleep. He was still quietly and happily glumming, when the morning light began to shine through the high window, and one of the agents of the police, entering without being heard, gazed at the sleeping artisan for a minute or two, as if to read on his countenance the secrets that might be in his bosom.

Nor is it at all improbable that such was really his intention, for everything in that day was a matter of espionage throughout the whole city of Paris. The very thoughts of men were subjects of minute investigation by the government; and it was supposed that all things could be performed by the cunning inquisition of the police into the actions, ideas, and feelings of the citizens. Not the judge upon the bench—not the minister in his cabinet—not the prisoner in his dungeon—not the profligate in the lowest resorts of vice and iniquity—was without a spy nearer to him than he imagined, marking all, and sometimes revealing all. In such circumstances, it may appear that no evil could be committed, no crime take place unpunished: but yet both occurred every day. The mass of wickedness, vice, and folly, was perhaps greater than at any other period, and in proportion very few offences were brought under the eye of the law.

Two causes combined to produce this effect. In the first place, with an active and clever nation, art naturally met art; and, in the space of fifty or sixty years, the police had actually drilled and trained the people to outwit them on many occasions. It might be well known to the lieutenant-general, that such and such a priest or abbe had been in this or that abode of licentiousness, and yet the lieutenant might have no idea of what criminal or treasonable meeting he had been at half an hour before or after.

wards. In the next place, the honourable society of *mouchards*, as the spies were called in France, had its own particular rules and regulations, its own peculiar habits and prejudices, its own rights and privileges, which were very frequently extremely inconvenient and annoying to the officers above them. A certain portion of information they felt themselves bound to afford; but they would afford no more, unless they were either very highly paid for it, or some special case was pointed out, in regard to which the police really wished to get accurate and complete information. The general mass of wickedness which they discovered, and, indeed, the particular instances of crime, either committed or meditated, were seldom, if ever, revealed unless some great object was to be gained; so that it is clearly ascertained, many a man has been allowed to go about Paris for three, four, five, or six years, when his life was entirely in the hands of six or seven infamous spies, whose views and purposes it did not suit to inform the police against him.

It sometimes happened that small or large bribes were given to procure this immunity; but, more frequently still, the silence of the *mouchards* was not at all mercenary; for they were a philosophical race of men, and saw things in an extended point of view. They were, indeed, so fully and generally convinced of the necessity of crime and wickedness of all kinds for the encouragement of their trade, and for the extension of their emoluments, that they would have been very sorry, indeed, to have given any serious discouragement to vice. They looked upon the world, in short, as a great orchard, where sins were produced for their benefit; and though they might gather the fruit, they would have been very sorry indeed, to cut down the trees.

Let it be remembered, all this time, that I am speaking alone of the city of Paris, which—although the citizens looked upon it as “France,” and both in their speech and notions had a certain confession of ideas upon the subject, which made them believe that Paris comprised everything in the world, and that France was only a small quarter or portion of it—let it be remembered, I say, that I am speaking alone of Paris, which was not, after all, the whole country. For a certain distance in the environs of the capital the influence of the French police and the system of espionage was felt. All the very large towns, too, of course, aped the metropolis in its public and its private vices; but there were wide tracts of country to which the system of espionage did not extend, and respecting which, as was afterwards lamentably proved, the French government possessed no information whatsoever, as far, at least, as regarded the wants and wishes, the habits and character, of the people.

To return, however, from this long digression to good Pierre Morin, and the agent of police. The latter—who had been originally a *mouchard*, and had afterwards been elevated to the dignity of an exempt, without losing his taste for the science to which he had originally addicted himself—having gazed, as we have said, for some time upon the countenance of the filigree-worker, and being satisfied by all he saw that the man was sleeping the sleep of innocence, pulled him by the arm and woke him up with a sudden start. “Come, come, sir,” he said, “got up. The lieutenant of

police wants to speak to you directly. You must come and tell what you know of this murder last night."

Now, *poor* Parisian, who was not a *mouchard*, bore a vast share of hatred and enmity to all individuals of that class, and scarcely less to officers of police; and Pierre Morin, consequently, was not at all disposed to hold any long conference with his companion. He shook himself in silence, without feeling very much discomposed by having slept in his clothes, and followed to the especial apartments of the lieutenant-general of police, where he was detained some time in an ante-chamber without seeing that officer.

At length, however, he was summoned to the great man's presence, and found him sitting in his bed-room, robed in an embroidered dressing-gown, and eating various savoury ragouts as a preparation for the labours of the day. It may seem that such a place and such a time were not very fit to receive the deposition of a witness in a case of murder, but things were so done in Paris in those days; and the lieutenant of police thus lost no time in eating his chicken and his sweetbreads, drinking his burgundy and water, and questioning Pierre Morin with the most admirable perseverance and determination.

Although a lieutenant of police was always a very awful sort of personage in the eyes of the lower order of Parisians, and even of the higher classes also, yet the good artisan was seldom without having all his wits about him; and he answered the questions which were asked of him with veracity, clearness, and precision. He told his tale not only truly but accurately; for though, at first sight, truth and accuracy may seem to be the same thing, yet in operation they are very different. Many a man who tells a story which is perfectly true is not believed, because he fails to put all things in their proper order, to add all the particulars which elucidate the facts and give the whole the air of verity. Pierre Morin, however, entered into all the details, informed the lieutenant of his visit on the preceding night to the unhappy man who had been murdered, related their conversation with so much point and truth that the officer himself smiled at the painting of the character of old Piteau, which was well known in Paris; and the artisan then proceeded to tell how the goldsmith had locked him up in the room, in order that his work might be done by the time required.

"I know not well," he continued, "how long I had been there, when I heard what I thought a cry, which seemed suddenly stifled. I persuaded myself it was nothing, however, and went on; but I had scarcely given the pincers a turn when there was a terrible sound of struggling in the next room, and I heard the voice of old Piteau, crying, 'Help, help! murder, murder!' There were bars upon all the windows, so there was no way to get out but by the door. As I knew that was locked, and it would take time to break the fastenings off, I snatched up one of the chasing chisels, and with it forced back the lock. When the door was open, I found the other room all dark, but the lamp I had been working with lighted up in a minute. The first thing I saw was the poor old man upon the ground, with two men, dressed like gentlemen, on their knees over him; one squeezing his mouth and head down

upon his floor with his hand, while the other seemed stabbing him with a knife. The minute I came in, one started up."

"Stay, stay," said the lieutenant, "you say stabbing him with a knife; their swords were not drawn, then?"

"No, no," replied Pierre Morin; "there were no swords drawn at that time; not, indeed, till I had knocked the man down with my hammer who first started up."

"Where is the hammer?" demanded the lieutenant.

"Here," answered Pierre Morin, taking it out of his pocket, and giving it to the officer, who held out his hand for it.

"Go on," said the lieutenant; "what happened next?"

"Why, then," replied Pierre Morin, "the other, who was upon his feet by this time, drawing his sword, rushed at me; but poor old Fiteau helped me at that pinch, though he was as dead as Ste. Geneviève, for the scoundrel stumbled over him before he could run me through with his rapier. Thereupon I scrambled out of the door as fast as I could, and, banging it to, locked it upon them. They struggled hard to get it open, but they could not; though, if they had not been two fools, or else stupefied by what they had done, they would have soon picked the lock with all the tools that I left there. In the meanwhile, I ran out of the shop and gave the alarm; and you yourself, monseigneur, know all the rest."

It will be remarked, in this account, that good Pierre Morin did not think fit to say one word—on the present occasion, at least—concerning the person whom he had seen on the outside of the door. It might be forgetfulness, it might be a certain feeling of compassion or good-nature which made him not wish to implicate a man, of whose guilt he had no certain proof, in so terrible an accusation. There was no necessity, it is true, of saying anything more unasked; for as soon as he had given the mere details of the murder, the lieutenant of police began to question him in a closer manner.

"So," he said, "you intend me to believe all this?"

"Indeed I do, monseigneur," replied Pierre Morin; "and what's more, you do believe it, I can see very well; you are not the man to mistake between truth and falsehood when they are put before you, I am sure."

"Indeed," said the lieutenant of police, with a sarcastic smile at the broad flatness which the peasantry of France are almost as ready to apply as the peasantry of Ireland, thinking it nothing more than common courtesy after all. "Indeed, you are certainly a man of genius, Monsieur Pierre Morin; and though you are clearly new to the trade, you have as much impudence as the oldest *filou* in Paris. You do not do great honour to my penetration, however, when you tell me this ridiculous story of the sordid old goldsmith leaving you on his premises all night, and of your consenting to remain shut up in a room till he chose to set you free in the morning."

"If you will not believe that, monseigneur," replied Pierre Morin, perfectly calmly, "pray tell me what you will believe?"

"Why, probably," answered the lieutenant of police, "that you are yourself one of the accomplices, left in the outer shop while your two companions did the deed within; and that, alarmed by the old man's cries, or by somebody coming, you shut the door

upon the others, and gave the alarm. It was a clever trick, if must own, and, as such, should not go without its reward. If you will confess the whole, then, and bear witness against these two friends of yours, you shall have a pardon yourself, and we may do something for you. No man ever makes so good an exempt as one who has been apprehended two or three times himself. What say you?"

"Oh, monseigneur, I will bear witness against the two willingly," replied Pierre Morin; "but there is another, a very honest fellow, whom I will not bear witness against, and his name is Pierre Morin."

The lieutenant of the police seemed to be amused with the good artisan's quickness of retort; and being very well convinced that Morin had nothing to do with the murder, he dropped the tone in which he had been speaking, and said, "Well, well, let us hear what you can really bear witness to?"

"To everything I saw," replied Pierre Morin.

"Not so quick, not so quick," cried the lieutenant: "what was the precise hour at which you went to the shop of old Fiteau?"

"I can't exactly say to a minute," replied the artisan, "for I neither looked at the clock nor heard it strike; but it was just that hour when the western sky is all red and gold, and the eastern is of a mouse colour."

"That is to say, about half-past six," said the lieutenant: "and pray what time did the boy go?"

Now although, as we have said, the lieutenant of police was perfectly well convinced that Pierre Morin was innocent of any share in the murder, and, moreover, recollected that the artisan had said that the boy was in the shop when Fiteau shut him up in the work-room, yet such was his habit of trying to entangle men in their talk, that he could not resist putting this question, simply to see what answer the fligree-worker would make.

"Just at seven o'clock," replied the artisan at once, very much to the surprise of the lieutenant.

"Indeed!" said the officer: "pray, which way did he go?"

"That I can't tell," replied Pierre Morin, with a laugh; "I was shut up in the work-room, you know."

"Then pray how can you tell at what hour he went?" demanded the officer.

"Because," answered Pierre Morin, grinning at having puzzled the magistrate, "because I had jumped up on the table to open a bit of the small window, and I heard old Fiteau say to the boy, 'Be quick, you sloth, be quick, and do not lose time by the way.' Then, the moment the door was shut, the boy began a tune that I often heard him whistle before, but stopped when Notre Dame struck seven, because, I suppose, its song and his did not sound well together."

The lieutenant-general smiled, for mental fencing was an art in which he took great delight, even when his opponent parried skillfully his attack. "Bring in the boy Pierre Jean," he said to a clerk who was writing busily at a table not far off; and the obsequious and silent noter-down of other men's sayings and doings rose without a word, glided out of the room, and returned as quietly

with poor Fiteau's errand-boy. The youth was all agast at the awful presence into which he was brought, and seemed just in that state in which a skilful cross-examiner can contrive to make a witness say anything he pleases.

"Pray what were the last words your master said to you last night?" said the lieutenant-general of police. "Mark me, the last words he said to you?"

"He said—~~he~~ said," replied the boy, looking first up to the ceiling and then down upon the floor, "he said, 'Carry that to Madame de Rohan's.' That's the last thing he said."

The lieutenant of the police grinned; but before he could interpose, the filigree-worker had exclaimed, "What did he say to you outside the door, Pierre Jean?"

A look of intelligence came up into the boy's face at the sound of a familiar voice, and he replied at once, "Oh, he said then, 'Be quick, be quick, and do not lose time by the way;' and he called me a sloth, too, though I always make as much haste as I can."

It was now Pierre Morin's turn to grin, and the boy having been sent out of the room, the lieutenant of police proceeded to interrogate the artisan upon various other points. The first of these was in reference to what he had done with the instrument employed in forcing back the lock. Next, he strongly and severely cross-examined him as to which of the murderers had the knife in his hand, and which was stifling the voice of the unfortunate goldsmith at the moment when the filigree-worker made his way into the room.

To all his questions the answers of Pierre Morin were clear, definite, and pointed. He never hesitated, nor contradicted himself, or varied in the slightest particular from any statement that he made; and still as he answered, the clerk at the neighbouring table took rapid notes of all his replies. The character of the artisan rose very high in the opinion of the lieutenant-general of police, not so much on account of the moral rectitude he displayed—for the officer of police had no objection to a good rogue on an occasion—as on account of his quickness, precision, and presence of mind, which, as is very evident, are high qualities in those who have anything to do with such subjects as come under the notice of the police.

After having questioned the artisan for more than half an hour, he suddenly asked him if he could write; and receiving an affirmative answer, he made him transcribe two or three sentences, which he looked at with an approving exclamation, and then bade him go into the next room and wait for him there.

Pierre Morin found in the neighbouring chamber several exempts in the dress which was at that time worn by those personages, and two other people in plain clothes, who were, in fact, officers of the police of a superior class, and less ostensible functions. These were the persons who, armed with a *lettre de cachet* and with a sufficient body of inferiors, unseen, but within call, would whisper a few words with a soft air to clergyman or nobleman, warrior or magistrate in the midst of a gay assembly or a public promenade, and the spectators would see the cheek grow pale, the smile wither away upon the lip, the knees tremble, and the eyes lose their light, as the

victim of arbitrary power followed a mandate which could not be resisted.

Pierre Morin looked about for the boy, and not seeing him as he expected, he ventured to ask one of the exempts where he was. The exempt looked at him with a smile, somewhat contemptuous, and then replied, "You will soon learn, my friend, that in this room nobody asks any questions, nor answers any."

"I am sure they ask enough in the other," replied Pierre Morin.

"There is another chamber still," replied the exempt, "where they employ only one, but which you might find somewhat difficult to bear if you were put to it."

This plain allusion to the torture quelled all poor Pierre Morin's gaiety in a moment, and he remained in dead silence till, after some coming and going between the room in which he sat, and that in which he had left the lieutenant of police, he was taken down the stairs by one of the exempts, and put into a *fiacre*, which rolled away towards the Châtelet. At the door of that building stood the carriage of the lieutenant of police, who had preceded the artisan by a few minutes; and on passing through the small wicket into the interior of that gloomy and awful abode of wretchedness and crime, the porter whispered something to the exempt, who paused in his progress, and, seeing that poor Pierre Morin had advanced a step or two before him, he told him to stand back till he was called for. "People get in here fast enough," he said, in a sullen tone; "you may find it more difficult to get out again."

The good filigree-worker very easily believed the words of the exempt; and, in fact, his advance had been rather the effect of agitation at finding himself in such a place, than of alacrity. What he was brought there for he knew not; and although he derived some hope of not being detained there, from the circumstance of the criminal lieutenant having preceded him, yet many a vague and horrible apprehension was raised in his breast by the sight of those dark arches and heavy walls, which were but too terribly famed in French history. In this state of uncertainty and fear, the poor artisan would gladly have turned his attention to anything but his own situation; and an immense large dog, with a leathern collar bristling with iron spikes, which stood beside the gaoler,* was the first object with which he endeavoured to employ himself. On putting out his hand, however, to pat the animal's head, he found that it was inspired by the spirit of the place: first snapping violently at the hand that attempted to caress it, and then, after looking at him fiercely for a moment, flying at his throat with a sharp yell. The turnkey laughed, but made a sign with his finger to the dog, which instantly retreated to his master's side.

A long silence ensued: but Pierre Morin was neither of an age nor a nation, nor a character to remain long still and unoccupied; and after fixing his eyes for a minute or two on some object on the other side of the court, he moved a little towards a large heavy

* Each of the turnkeys of the Châtelet at this time was followed by one or more of these dogs, who, we have reason to believe, were taught to drive the prisoners hither or thither like flocks of beasts. They were trained, too, we are told, with extraordinary care.

wooden case which stood close by the wicket. It bore evident signs of having been constructed many years before; was in shape like a very large coffin; and Pierre Morin would willingly have asked what was its use, had he not received more than one ever rebuke in the course of the morning. The eyes of the gaoler, however, followed him, and then turned towards the exempt with a grin and meaning smile.

"Do you know what that is, my good youth?" the turnkey said, at length. "That is what we call *the crust of the pie*."

Poor Pierre Morin was as much in the dark as ever; and, not choosing to ask any farther, he remained murmuring, "The crust of the pie! The crust of the pie!"

"Ay," said the turnkey, after having suffered him to puzzle himself with the matter for some time; "the crust of the pie; that is to say, it is the *cercueil bannal*: the coffin of the quarter. Now you see that when one of our pets dies, which generally happens every other day, we pop him in there at once, and send him to the burying-ground, where he lies quite as comfortably in his shroud as if he had ever so many feet of oak round about him. That is a needless luxury, too, a shroud; I don't see why we should give them a shroud: they give us nothing but trouble."

"And do you bury them directly?" said Pierre Morin, in a low voice.

"To be sure," replied the turnkey; "what should we keep them above ground for? We give half an hour to make sure that it's all right, and then we cart them off. It sometimes happens, indeed, that one of our *pailleux** dies while another is sickish, and then we wait till we see if the other won't go too. You see the crust of the pie is big enough to hold more than one partridge;" and, laughing aloud at his own joke, he gave the public coffin a kick with his foot, and then added, as it returned a dull hollow sound, "It is empty now; but I put three in it yesterday, so that may do for a day or two at least."

It is astonishing how familiarity hardens the heart of man to human suffering, and steels us against all the strange and horrible things of earthly existence; but there are some men who, without any such terrible training, feel a pleasure in the sight of sorrow, derive a sort of agreeable excitement from witnessing the pangs and miseries of life in others. I once met with a man who had been the public executioner in a large city of France during the most sanguinary period of the Revolution. He had become a cripple, in consequence of wounds afterwards received in war, and had known in his own person much of the anguish and sorrow which he had formerly aided to inflict upon others; but yet, when I asked him if he did not look back with horror and regret at those times and deeds, he laughed, and said, "Not at all;" that he only wished such days would come back again, and that he were able to cut off the dogs' heads as before. His eyes, too, sparkled when he spoke on the subject, so as to leave no doubt of his sincerity.

Such a one was the turnkey with whom the good Pierre Morin was now speaking; and although he very well understood that the

* A name given to the prisoners, from their lying on straw in their dungeons.

artisan was not likely to remain under his gentle custody, yet he took delight in stirring up all sorts of apprehensions in his bosom, and in presenting every painful and disagreeable object to his mind that the place could suggest.

He was not suffered to go on much longer, however; for in a minute or two after the above dialogue had taken place, a messenger came to summon Pierre Morin and the exempt to the presence of the lieutenant of police. They found him at one end of a large hall, seated in an arm-chair, with two or three clerks at a table beside him, and at the other end of the room some twenty or thirty prisoners, with a number of gaolers and archers, as they were still called, though it must be understood that the bow and arrow had long disappeared from amongst them.

"Come hither," said the lieutenant of police, beckoning to Pierre Morin; and when the artisan had approached his side, he added, in a lower voice, "You are to understand by the words 'number one' the man who had the knife; by 'number two,' the man who held the goldsmith down. Mark all these prisoners as they pass before you; and when you recognise either of the assassins, say 'number one,' or 'number two,' as the case may be."

He paused for a few moments after he had spoken, and then made a sign to one of the turnkeys, upon which the prisoners, one by one, were ordered to march forward, and, passing before the lieutenant and those who surrounded him, to make their exit by a door on his left hand.

To the eye of a philosopher, it might have been a curious and interesting spectacle to trace, in the aspect of those unhappy men, the effects of imprisonment, under various circumstances, upon several characters. There was the gay light debauchee, who had found his way into the Chatelet in consequence of some criminal intrigue or idle quarrel, passing on upon the tips of his toes as lightly and thoughtlessly as if he had never committed evil or endured sorrow. There was the man of deeper feelings, bowed down by the sense of crime or shame, walking forward with the eye bent upon the ground, and the flushed hectic of anxious care upon his cheek. There was the daring and brutal criminal, hardened in offences and impudent in iniquity, staring full in the faces of those before whom he passed, and seeming almost inclined to whistle, as if in defiance of the authority which he believed had done its worst upon him. Then came the dull and heavy-man of guilt and of despair, who bore about with him the memories of many years' imprisonment and exclusion from all social intercourse, with the light of hope gone out in his eye and in his heart, and nothing left but tenacity of life and capability of endurance. But who was that who came at length, with a bold and even menacing brow, with a firm step and measured military tread, but withal a restless and anxious eye, and a lip which quivered—it might be with anger, it might be with apprehension?

"Number two," said the artisan aloud, as the prisoner passed, without the slightest hesitation, and with a firm, distinct, and even solemn voice, as if his mind were much affected by the importance of the occasion, and the awful duty that fell upon him.

"Are you quite sure?" demanded the lieutenant, in a low tone.

"As I live!" replied Pierre Morin; and immediately the lieutenant made a sign with his finger to one of the archers, who followed the prisoner out.

Two or three others now passed in succession before the lieutenant and his party, without a word being said by the good artisan. At length, however, there appeared a person of distinguished mein, who advanced with a graceful and easy step, slow, calm, deliberate, with no sort of expression upon his countenance which could at all indicate the feelings of his heart, unless it were a slight, but somewhat supercilious smile, as if contempt for the whole proceeding mastered every other sensation.

"Number one," said the artisan, firmly; and the prisoner, without taking any notice, passed on. Two more prisoners followed, without notice; and then, the lieutenant of police, rising, gave some directions, in a low voice, to the officers near him.

"Come hither, my friend," he said, at length, turning to Pierre Morin. "We have seldom such fellows as you to deal with; but get you home, and rest in peace till I send for you again. Never be out of the house, however, for a whole day together, till this business is over; and if you behave as well at the trial as you have done to-day, we will give you something better to do than twisting silver wire into filigree baskets."

CHAPTER VII.

In all the streets and alleys of the city of Paris, in the squares, and along the quays, there was a continual cry kept up during the whole of the morning of the 30th of April, by a number of men whose stout lungs had acquired redoubled power, by the constant practice of shouting forth whatever was calculated to excite the curiosity of the Parisian public.

"*Arrêt de mort! Arrêt de mort! Sentence of death! Sentence of death!*" cried the sturdy hawkers, as they ran through the streets, with the bundles of printed papers in their hands, selling, for a small piece of copper, to the eager multitude, the judgment of the law in the trial of the Count de H—— and the Chevalier de M——, for the cold-blooded and deliberate murder of the old goldsmith, Gabriel Fiteau.

The people read the sentence with surprise and terror; for the names of both the condemned announced noble blood and high station; and the punishment, the horrid punishment of the wheel, was one which, in the memory of man, had never been inflicted on any but one of lowly race. Almost daily, indeed, the people saw one of their own class undergo the same terrible fate without wonder or horror; and many who witnessed with their own eyes the bloodshed and the agony, prepared the very next day, by some similar crime to that of the wretch who had just expired, to take their place on the same scaffold where he had suffered. But now—oh! strange human nature!—the very same persons, who beheld the punishment almost with indifference in men of lower rank, attached feelings of awe and horror to it, which they had never felt before now that it was to be inflicted upon the nobles of the land. They,

in fact, transferred, by a strange process of the human mind, the abhorrence which they should have felt for the additional guilt implied by the circumstance of education, to the punishment about to be inflicted, and viewed the wheel with sensations with which they had never regarded it before.

Such was the popular feeling upon the occasion of this condemnation; but amongst the nobles themselves, still more agitation and horror existed. Pride came into play in their case; the pride of blood, and of that rank which had long given them a certain degree of immunity in the commission of evil. The privileges of their station, they fancied, extended to all and everything. They were indignant at the very sentence pronounced by the court—that two noblemen should be broken on the wheel like common felons; and they doubted not, they would not doubt, that the sentence would be commuted, even if the criminals were not pardoned. At first, they had the daring to ask for absolute pardon; but the stern countenance with which they were received, soon taught them that they must be more moderate, and a commutation was all that was required.

The answer was, "It is impossible:" and now every argument and entreaty was made use of to obtain some mitigation; thousands of the nobility flocked to the palace; conferences were held amongst themselves; and it was represented to the prince who then governed France, that the criminals were connected with all the first families of the land. They urged the horror, the shame, and the disgrace it would be to many a high and noble person, if the degrading sentence, usually pronounced upon a conviction of common felons, should be carried into effect against two men of so high a rank. The prince was immovable, however; and to every entreaty urged upon these grounds, he replied—"It is the crime that makes the disgrace, not the punishment."

The fatal day arrived; and though till the last moment efforts were still made, yet, at the appointed hour, the dark procession began to move from the Châtelet to the Place de Grève, and the awful scene of public execution was enacted without one particular of the sentence being omitted in the punishment of the murderers of Gaultier Piteau. Limb by limb, and bone by bone they were broken on the wheel by the iron bar of the executioner; and the cries of even the firmest of the two made the air ring around, till they had no longer strength to utter more than a mere entreaty for water to quench their burning thirst, and for the blow of death to terminate their agony.

While this awful scene was enacting in the Place de Grève, and while it was producing its effect, not only upon the minds of those who witnessed the punishment, but upon the higher as well as the lower orders of France, our good friend, Pierre Morin, remained closeted with the lieutenant-general of police, talking over many matters of no slight interest to the good artisan. At length the conference closed, and the fligree-worker issued forth into the streets, and took his way towards a part of the town which went by the name of the Temple.

Not only those who had only seen him as we have described him in the first chapter of this work, clothed in his labouring jacket, and

leathern apron, but those also who had beheld him in his holiday suit, ready to join the dance at the *guinguette*, would have been equally puzzled to recognise our old friend Pierre Morin, as he now appeared in the streets of Paris. He was dressed in a handsome suit of black, with his hair nicely combed and cut into the fashionable shape; his hands, which were somewhat too brown at that time for the rest of his appearance, were covered with fine gloves; he had a small sword by his side in a black sheath, and a new hat upon his head, in shape somewhat between that of the court beau and the young lawyer. Thus adorned was the outward man of good Pierre Morin; nor did he himself at all disgrace his habiliments. His good countenance naturally appeared to better advantage in a more becoming dress, and his powerful and fine person was equally benefited by the change of his garments. He seemed perfectly at ease in them also, and walked as if his leg had never known anything but a silk stocking, and his foot had been pressed by nothing coarser than cordovan. As he passed through the lieutenant's ante-chamber, some of the exempts looked at him with a grin, but their faces became composed into decent gravity the moment that he turned towards them. On his way along the street, if any person remarked him particularly, they might place him in their own minds amongst some of those not over rich, but rising classes, which were the general wearers of black coats at that time in Paris; the successful literary men, the poorer members of the academy, the promising artist, the celebrated musician. But the dress of Pierre Morin was well chosen, for it was, of all others that which was best calculated to pass without attracting any attention whatsoever.

Thus, as he walked on towards the Temple, he brushed against more than one distant acquaintance without receiving anything but a casual look, and not the slightest sign or token of recognition. Pierre Morin took no notice of them either; but it must not be inferred from that fact that the good artisan was one to suffer fortune to change favour. It was not in the slightest degree that he forgot or despised his former acquaintances; his heart was as warm and kindly, as honest and as true, as ever. But Pierre Morin had other objects in view—a new course of life was open before him—and he hoped, even in doing his duty therein, to be enabled to serve and assist some, in whose welfare he took a high and unselfish interest.

One of those whom he thus passed, as he went on slowly towards the Temple, was no other than our friend the Abbe de Castelnau, who was walking heavily forward, with his eyes bent upon the ground, his countenance paler than usual, and his lips shut tight together, as if some bitter and anxious thoughts were labouring in his bosom. Though Pierre Morin had sought for him anxiously, as the reader already knows, and had been much disquieted by not finding him, he would not be tempted by any consideration to stop him and speak with him now. The abbe, on his part, lifted his eyes for a moment to the artisan's face as he passed, but did not appear to recognise him in the slightest degree; and their clothes brushed against each other, without the wearers' speaking. It must be recollected, indeed, that the difference, in those days, between the dress of an artisan and that of a gentleman was very, very much

greater than it is at present; so that it was not at all astonishing that the abbe, who had seen Pierre Morin only twice, should not at all recollect him in his present garb. After proceeding upon the errand which took him to the Temple, a place which was then invested with the privileges of sanctuary, so far, at least, as the protection of debtors from their creditors went—for the right of shielding criminals from the arm of the law had long been done away with altogether—Pierre Morin returned to his home, where he found his good wife, Margiette, almost as gay a bird, in point of plumage, as himself. Leaving them, however, to enjoy the comforts of their new situation, we may as well speak a word or two more of the Abbe de Castelneau, having already mentioned his name in this chapter.

After proceeding some way along the streets, which were now nearly vacant, he was met by one of the hawkers crying an account of the execution of that morning, before the unhappy criminals were cold upon the wheel. Numbers of people coming away from the bloody scene then presented themselves; and the abbe—who was, in fact, at this period one of the inhabitants of the Temple, on account of a small debt which he could not pay—turned his steps home, for fear he should be discovered by some officer beyond the limits of his temporary asylum. On entering the dingy chamber which he there inhabited, the woman who took care of those apartments, as well as several others, placed a small paper packet in his hand, at the address of which the abbe looked gravely, while she retired to her usual avocations.

He then turned the packet, in order to open it and see the contents. But the moment his eye rested on the seal, his cheek turned as pale as death, his lips lost their colour, and the packet fell from his trembling hands. He gazed at it for a moment or two as it lay upon the ground, as if it presented some horrible sight to his eyes. But then, with a sudden effort, he stooped down, took it up, tore open the seal, and, to his surprise, beheld two or three of those "*actions de banque*," which were at that period in common circulation through the French metropolis as the chief paper money of the land. The sum thus placed before him was considerable; but, on the top of the notes, was a very small piece of paper, folded into the shape of a billet, and sealed with the same seal the sight of which seemed so much to surprise him. Within the note was written, "Abbe de Castelneau, quit Paris, and never return to it."

There was no signature, and the handwriting was unknown to him; but the words had a great effect upon his mind, if we may judge by the facts that his debt was immediately paid, and that, before sunset on that day, he was once more out of Paris, and on his way into the south of France.

CHAPTER VIII.

"I WILL tell you," says Rosalind, "who Time ambles withal, who Time trots withal, who Time gallops withal, and who he stands still withal." But the truth is, however, that Time gallops with us all. In the impatience of our boyhood he may seem to go too

slow, and in the feebleness of our age he may seem to go too fast, but, alas! his pace is very equable, as we all find at last, and skilful must be that rider whom he does not in the end leave in the mire.

It is an excellent observation of a great poet, that, let a man live as long as he will, the first thirty years of his life will always seem the longest; and the daily routine of our after years passes like the round of a clock, while the hands on the outside and the movements within, mark the passing of time to others, without a consciousness thereof in itself, till the weight has run down, and the pendulum stands still.

The place, however, in which time may be made to run the fastest is in a book, where the author, so long as he is writing it, at least, by the magic wand called his pen, reigns supreme with undisputed sway over everything that is brought within his own particular circle. Even Time himself, the hoary-headed sage whose resistless power neither towers nor temples, thrones nor dynasties, have been able to withstand, is obliged to obey when brought under that rod, and to hurry or slacken his pace according to the writer's will. He may, perhaps, revenge himself upon the readers afterwards, but here he is under our dominion; and, accordingly, I command that eighteen years shall pass, as if it were but a dream, between the conclusion of the last chapter and the events which I am now about to record. Suppose yourself, gentle reader, to be one of the seven sleepers, and the interval that I now propose to you will seem but as a short nap.

Space, too, I must control as well as time, and lead the mind away from the busy metropolis of France into a distant province, conveying myself and others into the midst of scenes far more congenial to all our feelings than the dull and dusty capital, with its vicious crowds and idle gaities, where pleasure supplies the place of happiness, and luxury tries to pass itself for contentment.

Eighteen years had elapsed, then, since the execution of the murderers of Gaultier Fiteau. Eighteen years had elapsed since the talent and decision which Pierre Morin had displayed on that occasion had attracted the notice of one who was willing and able to raise him above the station in which we have first depicted him. Eighteen years had passed since the Abbe de Castelneau had adopted, if we may so call it, the child Annette, and had quitted Paris, for the second time, since he first appeared before the reader.

What were the changes those eighteen years had produced? In the states and empires of Europe, changes immense and extraordinary! The same king, indeed, still sat upon the throne of France, but society itself had undergone a vast alteration, and all the relations of the kingdom with foreign states were different. Enemies had become friends, and friends enemies, and the nearest of the monarch's kindred were hostilely opposed to his views.

To a narrower circle, however, we must bound our own inquiries. What were the changes those eighteen years had produced in the Abbe de Castelneau, and the child he had so strangely adopted, at a moment when, as we have shown, he had but little wealth of any kind even to support himself? In person, he remained very much the same as we have already described him. His hair

might be somewhat more grey; and certain indescribable appearances might indicate to an attentive eye, that Time's wing had flapped more than once over his head, since we first presented him to the eye of the reader. He was older in appearance, but yet not much; for at the former period he had looked older than he really was, and at the latter he looked younger.

In his mind there had taken place various changes: and although I do not intend to enter into any minute account of his character, but rather to let it develop itself, yet it may be as well to keep in mind that this is no creation of the fancy, but a living creature of flesh and blood, a being mingled of good and evil, which then existed, and which has had many a successor since. It is well to remember, also, that he was a man of strong passions and feelings, both vicious and virtuous; and that the thing then called philosophy had taken away from him those principles upon which his good feelings might have rested secure, and had only served to teach him to conceal his sensations from others, and very often from himself.

Since he had quitted Paris, however, the better feelings had obtained wider sway, there was not, in short, so much temptation to evil; there were many opportunities of good. He learnt to abhor, in new employments and occupations, amusements in which he had formerly sought for the exercise of a keen and active mind, and the gratification of an eager and excitable disposition. The gaming-table had been one of his greatest resources, and he had always sought those games in which chance and skill had an equal share, in order that he might stimulate his heart by expectation and anxiety, and exercise his mind by calculation at the same time. There was also a sort of pride and pleasure to him in displaying a certain stoical apathy, which he did not really feel, in regard to the risks and the event of the game. Since he had quitted Paris, however, he had never touched, nor even seen, a card. He had found for himself occupation in the neighbourhood of a small house, not far from the town of Agen, in which he dwelt for ten years; and out of the very limited income that remained to him, he had contrived to do great good amongst the peasantry around. He had quieted dissensions, assisted the poor, had given education to the young, and advice to the old; and, living very frugally himself, he never felt the pressure of need, nor regret at the loss of luxury.

In his own home, however, still remained the sweet child whom he had adopted; and that very fact might be, perhaps, the great cause—though beyond doubt there were many others co-operating—which produced such a change in the habits, if not in the character, of the Abbe de Castelneau. It was not only that she offered sufficient occupation for every spare moment; it was not only that she afforded sufficient excitement, and supplied a matter of continual speculation to his philosophy, but it was likewise—at least, I believe so—that there is something in the pure and simple innocence of infancy, a fragrance as it were, fresh from the hand of the great Creator of all spirits, which naturally communicates itself to those who are brought near it; purifying, sanctifying, and blessing, by the sight of that guilelessness which they must love, and the loss of which, in their own case, they must regret.

This very fact was a matter of speculation to the Abbe de Castelneau himself; and often, when he quitted her, after having amused himself for many an hour with her infant sports and gambols, he would walk forth up the side of the hill with his eyes bent down upon the ground, looking thoughtful, and, as the peasantry used to fancy, gloomy, but with a chastened joy in his heart which he had never known in scenes of revelry, and pleasure, and indulgence.

"It is strange!" he would murmur to himself—"it is very strange! I feel better, and wiser, and happier; and all from communion with a child!"

Thus passed by the days, to him seeming almost as brief as the sentences in which we have recorded the lapse of those eighteen years. But before much more than one-half of those eighteen years had flown, a great change took place in the fortunes of the Abbe de Castelneau; and he was suddenly not only restored to as much affluence as he had ever known, but to much greater wealth than he had ever any right to expect. It was not that any of the different benefices which he held, having satisfied the claims of his creditors, were turned to his own use, for it required a longer time than that to pay all the debts that he had contracted; but, at the end of the ninth year, a report reached him that the son of his uncle, the Count de Castelneau—the only surviving son—for it may be recollected that the elder son had been killed in battle about the period at which this history commenced—was dangerously ill.

The tidings seemed to affect him but little, for this young man had been but a mere boy when the late abbe had been admitted within the walls of the chateau of Castelneau. He had loved his elder cousin most sincerely, and had lamented him truly and deeply when he fell by the banks of the Rhine; but his own conduct had excluded him for many years from the dwelling of his noble relation, and he took no thought nor interest in the young heir of that high house.

Soon after, news again reached him that the youth was dead: all he said in the way of mourning was, "Poor boy!" But he added, "Now, were I avaricious, I would go and throw myself at the feet of this old man, profess repentance for all my past errors, and induce him to leave me his rich estates, as well as the old chateau which must be mine—unless, indeed, he marry again, and have another heir. But I will do none of these things: he was cruel to his eldest son, harsh to his own unhappy wife, stern and unjust to me, and I will not bend to him. Let him leave his wealth to whom he will, I shall have enough to give a dowry to my sweet little Annette, and that will close the account well."

He went not to see his uncle, nor held any communication with him; and it may be easily supposed that this uncle took no notice of him. Not long after, however, the Bishop of Toulouse, in passing through that part of the country, took up his abode at the abbe's house for a day or two, inquiring into various facts concerning the neighbouring districts, in regard to which none could give him such good information as his host. The abbe entertained him with a degree of studied plainness that amused the good prelate,

but put him at his ease. There was certainly a slight addition made to the breakfast, dinner, and supper of the Abbe de Castelneau, but it was in quantity, not in quality, that any change appeared. The bishop was struck, pleased, and amused; too, with the young Annette, and asked her name one day after she had just quitted the room.

"Annette, de St. Morin," replied the abbe, briefly.

The bishop smiled. "Not your child, I hope, monsieur l'abbé?" said the bishop.

"Yes, my lord!" replied the abbe; but the moment after he added, with a low and cynical look, "my child by adoption and affection, but nothing more."

The bishop made no reply, but took his leave of the abbe on the following day; and some months passed in the usual course, without any event of any importance sufficient to require notice here. At length, however, a courier with a foaming horse stopped at the dwelling of the Abbe de Castelneau, who was at that moment walking down the steps of his house into the little garden that surrounded it. The courier bowed low, and presented to him a letter, which the abbe took, and turned to the address with the same calm and unmoved countenance which he now habitually maintained.

On the back of the epistle he read, "To the Abbe, Count of Castelneau, Castres, near Agen." The seal was black; and opening it he proceeded to read a letter from the curate of the parish in which the chateau of Castelneau was situated, informing him of the death of his relation, and telling him that the late count had left no will, having destroyed, the very day before he died, a will which he had made some time previous.

The abbe thus found himself at once in possession of rank and great wealth, but still he received such intelligence without a change of expression, and merely ordered his simple antiquated chaise—which seemed to have appropriated to itself all the dust that had been raised upon the roads in the vicinity for more than a century—to be brought round with the two long-tailed mules which had drawn him and his little charge about the neighbourhood of Agen ever since he had quitted Paris.

Everything was made ready in the space of two hours. The abbe got in first, the little girl and Donnine followed, the old manservant in the grey livery took his place on the outside, and, having hitherto acted the part of gardener as well as lackey, now performed the office of coachman. The journey occupied more than one day, as any person acquainted with the country may understand, although it must be remembered, that the Castelneau of which we speak is not that in the Herault, but rather that at the distance of some four or five leagues from Cahors, in one of the most picturesque and extraordinary parts of France. There are two or three other places of the same name. Another belonging to the same family was to be found near Auch; but it will be remarked, that wherever the name of Castelneau is met with, there will likewise be found a combination of wood, water, and rocky scenery, affording much picturesque beauty, and presenting many a spot where the poet and the painter may rest and dream. The

Castelneau, however, near Auch, though it possessed at that time, and perhaps does so still, an old castle, was not inhabited by the Counts of Castlneau; and the place towards which the abbe bent his steps was that in Querci, not far from Figeac.

Everything was new and delightful to Annette de St. Morin, as the little girl was now called, so that to her at least the journey did not seem a long one. The abbe showed no impatience on his own part; but still he pressed the mules upon their work, as the funeral of the late count was to be delayed till his arrival.

At length he reached the castle of his ancestors—a castle, probably the oldest of the kind in France, of which many parts still stand, as they were raised from the ground in the dark ages under the Merovingian kings of France. The servants, drawn up in mourning, waited him in the great hall, with somewhat of feudal pomp and parade; and, passing through the double line, the abbe went on without taking notice of any one till he reached the chamber which had been prepared for him, and in which the curé of the village, and the principal notary of Figeac, had remained till his arrival.

The funeral was performed with great pomp. The abbe took undisputed possession of the property; and, accompanied by the notary, broke the seals which had been placed upon the various cabinets, and went through the examination of innumerable papers which had belonged to the dead man.

It is always a sad and terrible task—where there is any human feeling left in the heart—that of examining the papers and letters of those who are gone. The records of fruitless affections, of disappointed hopes, of tenderness perhaps misplaced, perhaps turned by the will of fate to scourge the heart that felt it, are there all before our eyes. Side by side, at one view, and in one instant, we have before us the history of a human life, and its sad and awful moral: we have there the picture of every bright enjoyment, of every warm domestic blessing; while, written by the hand of death beneath them, is the terrible truth: “These are all past away for ever, and so will it soon be with thee likewise!”

Whether he felt these things or not, nobody could tell from the countenance of the Abbe, Count de Castelneau. He appeared neither more nor less sad after the examination than before. One thing, however, he did find amongst the papers of his deceased relation, which called up to his lip that faint and doubtful smile of which we have before had occasion to speak. This was a letter from the Bishop of Toulouse to the late Count de Castelneau, and dated some few months before the death of the latter. It gave an account of the abbe's own state and character at the time, and represented him as entirely changed and reclaimed from all the vices which at one time had degraded him, living an honourable and useful life, and conferring many benefits on those who surrounded him.

The Abbe de Castelneau sealed the letter up, and labelled it with the words, “My character from my last place;” but he did not doubt, any more than the reader does, that this very character, given to him by the Bishop of Toulouse, had put him in possession of the wealth and estates which were now his. It may be asked,

If that wealth brought happiness with it? the answer must be, it would appear not. The abbé was not more cheerful, even less so; his gravity sunk into gloom; there was a sadness about him which not even the presence of the being he loved best on earth, his own little Annette, as he used to call her, could altogether dissipate.

His personal habits in the meantime remained almost unchanged, though he took the necessary measures to free himself from his obligations to the church. The whole neighbourhood said, when they heard of this, that the Count de Castelneau would marry for the sake of an heir; that he was a young man, and a handsome man, and one that had loved but too much the society of women. It was not likely, therefore, that he would remain single; and everybody anticipated that Annette de St. Morin would soon feel a great difference in the conduct of her father by adoption; for that a new mistress would be speedily given to that household of which she had been hitherto the pride and delight.

The count, however, did not justify these prognostications. Though he had abandoned the church, he still retained in all his garments, the grave hue of its habiliments; lived with infinite frugality and moderation, and showed a great distaste of that which is commonly called society. The Count de Castelneau might still have retained possession of some of the rents and revenues which he had derived from the church, although he had freed himself from his vows in all due form, as was but too frequently the case in France at that time. He did not think fit so to do, however, but paid all his debts, and resigned every benefice, abbey, and impropriation which had formed the great bulk of his income before the death of his uncle. In the management of his own property he was liberal and charitable to others, though sparing to himself; and, had he sought for such honours, might have gained the character of a saint. But of such a distinction he was in no degree ambitious.

CHAPTER IX.

HAVING traced the passing of the eighteen years which we have mentioned, as far as in their flight they influenced the situation of the Abbé de Castelneau, we must now pause for a short time to inquire into their effect upon another of our characters; though here the subject is infinitely more delicate, and the investigation more obscure.

To examine into the tortuous ways of the human heart—a labyrinth where darkness is added to intricacy—is, at the best, a most difficult task; for where shall we find a clue, where a light to guide us, where a voice to tell us, at each step, whether we are right or wrong? But to examine into the heart of a woman, is a more difficult undertaking still; for the paths are finer and less distinctly traced, and very, very often, even the owner of the place remains wilfully ignorant of all the many turnings and windings of the way. Coarse hands can separate the bundles of coarse twine; but it needs a fine touch to divide the film of the silkworm, or to discover the flaws of the diamond. Nevertheless, it is a part of my ap-

pointed task, to examine the progress, and inquire into the character and feelings, of her whom we must now call, as her father by adoption had called her, Annette de St. Morin.

We left her an infant; a very beautiful infant, truly; full of engaging graces and sweet smiles, overflowing with health and good temper. Tears were great strangers in her eyes, even as a child; and, whatever she might carry out of the world, or go through therein, she certainly brought into it as great a fund of happy sensations as ever infant was yet endowed with. Human nature is so fond of happiness, that it is scarcely possible to help loving any being we see innocently happy. The reverse, indeed, does not hold good, for the deepest and tenderest interest can be excited by the sight of virtuous grief; but still there is something so engaging in happiness, that few hearts can witness it without being attracted towards those who possess it. Certain it is—whether by the possession of this attractive power, or what other quality, I know not, certain it is that Annette de St. Morin, as an infant, engaged the hearts of all those who surrounded her. We have already mentioned the love which she excited in the Abbe de Castelnau:—it was the same with the good Donnine, it was the same with the old lackey, and with every other person that approached her. This was the case in infancy; and as time daily more and more developed her graces, and opened new channels for her sunshiny cheerfulness to display itself—as she learned to clap her little hands with joy when anything pleased her, to run from one fond friend to another, and to speak broken words with the sweet tongue of childhood—there came melting sensations over hearts that had never melted before, and feelings of tenderness that set all cold philosophy at defiance.

She preserved all the beauties and the graces with which she set out in life till she was about seven years old; and, during that period, she went through all the ordinary diseases of childhood, showing, in moments of suffering and sickness, the same imperturbable and happy calm which we have before mentioned. She might be languid with fever, but she was never querulous nor irritable; the lip might be parched and the eye dull; but there was always a smile came up upon the face when her ear caught the sounds of the voices that she loved.

When she was about seven years of age, she began to lose the beauty which had distinguished her; her features grew ill-proportioned, her face thin, her form lost the roundness of childhood; and though her eyes were still fine and her hair beautiful, yet no one, who did not examine very closely, perceived any promise of after-loveliness. This state of transition continued for several years; and at the time when she arrived at the chateau of Castelnau, many of the ladies in the vicinity pronounced her an ugly little girl; and, though they looked in vain for any likeness between her and her adopted father, yet argued strongly that she must be his own child, otherwise, he could take no interest in one so devoid of beauty.

There was a change coming, however. Some two years after, the complexion of Annette de St. Morin began to resume the clear rosy brightness which it had in her infancy. Her form grew, not

only tall and graceful, but rounded in the most exquisite contour; gradually, year after year, her features became finer, the whole arrangements of her countenance more harmonious, her eyes retained their brightness and their lustre, the lashes that overshadowed them appeared longer, and, softer, every day; and the lips, which had always smiled sweetly, now became full and rosy, with that exquisite bend, which is so rarely seen, except on the cold, pale face of the Grecian statue. The hand and the foot remained small and symmetrical; and it was remarked, that, in whatever way they fell, the lines they formed were all full of grace. Even her hair, which was very luxuriant, though it did not absolutely curl in large masses, except when very long, yet had an irrepressible wave which pervaded the whole, and caught the light in glossy gleams wherever the sun fell upon it. In short, she thus changed twice in those eighteen years: from a lovely infant to a plain child, and from a plain child to a most beautiful woman.

Such had been the alterations of her person during the period I have mentioned; and I have spoken of them first, as less difficult to deal with than her mind. But that mind went on step by step, developing all its powers under careful nurture. The course of education to which the abbe subjected her, was very strange, when his circumstances and situation are considered. It was not the education which one would have expected from a man, a dissipated man, a Frenchman, or a Roman Catholic. In the first place, it was perfectly feminine; there was none of those harsh studies in it with which men, when intrusted with the education of women, so often unsex them. From the earliest age, he taught her the love of truth and sincerity, he implanted in her mind that everything was to be sacrificed to that; he made it, in short, the first principle of her education. But he taught her, too, to be gentle, and docile, and thoughtful for others. He taught her to avoid all that might give pain; but what may seem stranger than all, is, that he taught her these things all from one source—the book of our salvation.

In the course of so teaching her, he suffered the cause of his anxiety to fill her mind with the words of that book to appear on one or two occasions. The first time that he did so, was when she was about ten years old, and he found that something which she met with in the history of the Saviour, was too difficult for her to comprehend.

"My dear child," said the abbe, "you cannot understand it, and I do not expect you to do so; but I am giving these treasures to your heart, and not to your mind: your mind will share in them hereafter. I wish them to be part of your feelings, part of your existence: the dowry of your spirit. I tell you, Annette, that I would willingly give this right hand, to have received these words in youth, through the heart, rather than in manhood, through the understanding. For, oh! my sweet girl, after that heart has been hardened by the fierce fire of the world, we may be convinced without faith, and believe without feeling."

Upon this principle it was evident that he acted; but there was nothing in the least ascetic in his teaching, for it was all redolent of that joy and cheerfulness which breathes from the volume that

he opened to her. In short, he told her to be happy, and he taught her how.

He added, moreover, everything that could give her the graces of society, and the highest accomplishments that could be obtained. He thought none of these things frivolous and light when they did not interfere with higher things; and he believed, nay, he knew, that they might go hand in hand with the holiest thoughts. He showed her, that every talent and endowment possessed by man, whether corporeal or mental, is the gift of God: and that it is one part of the worship of God to cultivate and employ those talents by every means that he has placed within our power. "God has forbidden excess," he said, "in anything; and he himself has told us those things which in themselves are evil. Thus it would be an impious arraignment of his providence to say, that any of those things which he has given, and not forbidden, may not be used in moderation. The lark," he said, "my child, sings at the gate of heaven. Sing you also in the happiness of your heart; and in so singing, remember the God who made sweet sounds, and who taught man to harmonise them, and to give a finer voice to all the emotions of his mind. The finger of God, too," he said, "is in all the beautiful things of the world; and when, with the pencil, your hand traces them, my Annette, you will not forget the hand that formed them. Every enjoyment that is innocent and moderate we may believe was given us expressly from above; and the test by which you should try your enjoyments is by the prayer that you can repeat after them. If, after any pleasure, you can raise your voice to the Almighty with an attentive and unwavering mind, you may feel sure that your enjoyment has been moderate. If, with a knowledge of His word, you can ask Him to bless you in such things, you may be sure that your enjoyment has been good."

Such were the doctrines that he taught, and such were the principles upon which he acted towards his adopted child. It may be said, this was a much better and more amiable man than he has been represented in the beginning; but such is not the case. I have said that his character was mingled of good and evil; but his love for that child separated the good from the evil, and he gave all the better part to her.

Every advantage that any of the neighbouring towns could afford was procured for Annette with the most boundless generosity by the abbe, after he became Count de Castelnau. Every skilful master that could be heard of was called to the chateau to give her instruction in turn; and in the hours which were devoted to reading, the abbe, who was a man of refined taste, made her acquainted with all that was beautiful in the first writers in his own and other countries. One thing, however, he excluded entirely, which was that class of composition which was then generally called philosophy. He said, that a man who had once drunk of a cup of poison, and had suffered from the consequences all his life, would never hold the same to the lips of one he loved.

Conducted in this manner, we may easily conceive what was the effect of education upon a mind naturally full of high qualities, and endowed with very great abilities of all kinds. But there was one particular circumstance which affected, in a marked and peculiar

manner, the character of Annette de St. Morin. This was the state of comparative seclusion in which she lived. The Count de Castelneau courted not society; and, indeed, during a great part of the year there was but little to be found in the neighbourhood of the chateau. The metropolis, so to speak, had swallowed up, like a great gulf, the nobility of France; and few, if any of the members of that body, spent more than a month or two on their own estates. When they did appear in the country, they came with all the vices of a great city hot and flagrant about them, and, consequently, they were not very desirable companions either for the Count or his young charge. He took care, however, that the tone of her manners should be high and refined. She had the politeness of nature from gentleness of thought, and all those graces of demeanour which cultivation and refinement of mind can alone afford. But still there was a difference between herself and the general world of Paris. It was difficult to discern in what that difference lay, and yet it was very striking. It was, in truth, that she thought for herself, and did not think only as others thought. Of course, in very many respects, her thoughts were, in substance, the same as other people's; but they suggested themselves in different forms from those of other people, and they continually presented modes and expressions different from those which other persons would have used.

The society which she did mingle with in the neighbourhood consisted of a few of the old and respectable families of the province, in some of whom poverty, and in some of whom pride, counteracted the attractions of the capital and retained them in the country, where small means afforded all that was necessary, and where old blood and renowned ancestry were sufficient to insure distinction. In Paris such was not the case: there, even great wealth sunk down to competence; and old family and great renown were only regarded as small adjuncts to other more attractive qualities, and as nothing without them.

From time to time, too, the count visited the town of Cahors, and took Annette de St. Morin with him; and on those occasions, generally some public event, the royal officers of the province, and most of the other nobles, even from considerable distances, visited the town, and brought their families to grace the meeting.

Thus Annette de St. Morin was not without a thorough knowledge of all the forms and manners of the world, and was fitted in every respect to mingle gracefully with it, and to play her part even with distinction. Still, however, the greater part of her time was passed nearly in solitude; for at the chateau of Castelneau a visit was a rare occurrence, and to dine or sup out, in the neighbourhood was an event to be recorded in the history of the year. The count, it is true, during the early part of her life, devoted all the morning to teach and educate her; but after the hour of noon he spent a considerable portion of the day alone, and Annette was left to wander through the neighbouring country, and about the grounds of the chateau, as she thought fit.

Every one who has visited that part of France must know that the vicinity of Castelneau is very beautiful, and the very fact of its loveliness had a considerable effect upon her mind. There can be

no doubt, that upon the impressions which we receive in youth, through any of the senses, depend, in a great degree, the tastes, if not the feelings, which form our happiness or unhappiness in after years. Those impressions sink more deeply into our hearts than any others we ever receive. They are, as it were, the mould from which the clay takes its form while it is yet soft and unhardened by the fire of the world; and thus it was that Annette de St. Morin derived from the scenes in which she was accustomed to move peculiar habits of feeling which affected the whole course of her thoughts. Those thoughts were, if one may so term it, picturesque. She loved all that was beautiful, and great, and good; but there was a kind of enthusiastic eagerness in all she did, which was certainly derived from the grandeur and wildness of the scenery which surrounded her in her early years.

Annette's mind was not one that dwelt much upon herself. She knew that she was beautiful; for it is scarcely possible to conceive a situation in which that knowledge can be excluded from a woman's heart, without gross and shameful falsehood on the part of those who surround her; but she knew not how beautiful, nor was she vain of a quality which she estimated at its due value and no more. She thought little of it, in short; and her mind scarcely rested for a moment at a time upon a gift which she felt was shared by every flower and every bird. It was natural that—not living amongst people with whom such things were of much consequence, whom beauty did not attract, and whom plainness would not have repelled—it was natural that she should not attach to personal advantages that unreal worth which a vain world in general accords to it. She knew not that vice and folly would often be sought and followed for the sake of beauty, where virtue and wisdom would attract no attention nor respect. I have said she knew not, but I should have said she comprehended not; for she had read and heard that it was so, and, perhaps, gave mere assent to the tale without bringing the thing home to her own heart; for there is a great difference between those three acts, knowing, and comprehending, and feeling. Of course, though she might have knowledge, she had no experience; and though she had principles to guide her own conduct, she had no data to judge of that of others. Her father, by adoption, had indeed taken pains to give her some insight into the world's ways, yet she had learnt the facts but as a lesson, without any practical application thereof. She often, indeed, was tempted into wild and vague speculations as to what that great world really was which she heard so frequently talked of; and as she walked by the banks of any of the manifold rivers of that land of streams and fountains, she would gaze thoughtfully upon the waters, wishing that, like them, her mind might flow on through all the thousand scenes of bright nature and glad human life which decorated their banks, and see that busy world of action and endeavour which each town along their course was certain to display. She would picture to herself all that might then meet her eye, and the many matters of deep interest and curiosity which might be opened to her sight. But then, again, a voice seemed to whisper from within, that those waters could not pass amidst the scenes of man's existence without their brightness being troubled by im-

purity, till at length they would reach their conclusion in a turbid and darksome stream; that never could they turn back upon their course; but must go onward for ever, bearing with them every burden that was cast upon them, and every fouler stream that was poured in upon their once pure bosom. She shuddered as she thus thought, and the brief curiosity in which she had indulged passed away like a dream.

This was not the only speculation, however, with which she amused herself; for knowledge without experience is ever visionary: but as she walked in solitude through the woods and upon the hills in the neighbourhood of Castelneau, during those hours which the count spent alone in the chateau, thousands of bright fancies would rise before her eyes, imaginations that would have become hopes if they had had any tangible object to fix upon. She would ask herself the meaning of the lark's gay song; she would give a voice to the whispering of the wind; the flowers would wake into life under her eyes, and act their parts in dramas of her own creation. These things grew upon her in her sixteenth, seventeenth, and her eighteenth year; but a time was rapidly coming when visions were to give place to realities, and her heart was taught to speak instead of her imagination.

CHAPTER X.

THE chateau of Castelneau still presents towers, and ramparts, and bastions of great antiquity, or at least it did so twenty years ago; but at the more remote period of which I speak, the building was in full preservation, and in external form retained all the peculiarities of the age in which it was built, though the interior had been modernized and fitted up with the luxurious extravagance of the reign of Louis XV. Within the walls of the chateau were no less than three large courts, separated from each other by massive piles of building, containing long and rambling corridors and extensive halls, with innumerable smaller chambers scattered here and there, with much space wasted, but with no small economy of light. Besides these masses of building, and the vast circuit of walls and towers that surrounded them and united them together, were several large square edifices detached from the rest of the castle, or only united to it, either by a sort of covered bridge high up in the air, or a passage cut through the rock beneath, and issuing forth from those apartments, which, in the modern arrangements that had been made in the castle, were appropriated to butlers, cooks, and serving-men. Though the mole-like process of proceeding under the earth gives an idea of mystery and darkness to our minds in the present day, when we are altogether what may be called an upstairs world, yet to the servants of the chateau of Castelneau the matter had become so familiar, that they passed through a subterranean passage, which would have furnished the highest enjoyment to one of the votaries of Utopia, as calmly and coolly as we go from one ordinary room to another. Notwithstanding the antiquity of the chateau itself, by some extraordinary forgetfulness on the part of its inhabitants, it

was unprovided even with a ghost. The eastern tower itself possessed some of the most cheerful apartments in the whole building; and that face of the chateau which looked towards the south contained several of the most gay and smiling halls that the arts of any period could have devised, with deep oriel windows, in the recesses of which the sunshine loved to linger and draw patterns on the oaken floor. In short, many parts of the castle afforded as bright and pleasant a habitation as it was possible for man to desire; and the number of servants and retainers, usually kept up therein, filled it so full of human life, that everything like the appearance of solitude was banished from its precincts.

The neighbourhood, indeed, though the land is most warm and sunny, had somewhat of the wild and the sublime in its general aspect. It retains more than any other part of France that I have visited, that feudal colouring, if I may so term it, which leads the mind back at once to early and more simple times. There are manifold woods and streams, wide forests, deep valleys, fountains innumerable. Nor are these last alone the sources of small rills, that spring in a jet of silver from the bank, and flow on, soon losing themselves in some greater body of water; but in some parts of that district, rivers burst at once from the green turf in the midst of the forest, issuing from a depth that no one as yet has been able to fathom. The houses of the peasantry, however lowly, have a neatness about them which speaks of natural taste: there is a love of flowers, and a fondness for bright, but harmonious, colours, which smacks of a peculiar sort of poetry of the mind; and the very jargon of the peasantry is sweet and softened, however incorrect, giving proof of an ear highly sensible to musical sounds. Here, indeed, was spoken in former times, in great purity, the soft *Langue d'Or*, undoubtedly one of the most harmonious tongues of modern Europe; and there is a charm in that harmony of language, in its connexion with the imagination, at which reason and philosophy are sometimes indignant. Many a very sensible and clever man has puzzled himself to divine how it is that the songs of the *Troubadours*, though very much inferior in reason and in wit to the compositions of their more northern neighbours, the *Trouveres*, have obtained a much higher reputation, and still retain their hold upon the public mind. There may be many causes for this fact, but one of those causes undoubtedly is, the superior harmony of the *Langue d'Or* over the *Langue d'Oil*.

However, that may be, everything around Figeac and its neighbourhood spoke not alone of the early days of the good olden time, but of early days in their brightest aspect—early days in their sunshine and calmness; for, alas, those early feudal days had also their clouds and their storms. The people of the district were not numerous, but food was plenty amongst them, and therefore, they might well be contented; for although plenty will not always produce content, yet very seldom, if ever, is content found without it. Neither was the population very thin: there were few moors or wastes of any kind, though the woodlands were extensive; but those woodlands, it must be recollected, were amongst the richest districts of the province. In the skirts of the forests, however, as well as in other places, were numerous villages and hamlets, and

often in the heart of the wood itself, appeared a neat cottage, always placed in the best and most picturesque situation on the top of some high bank, or on the slope of some gentle hill, where the advantages of air, and shelter, and dryness, were all combined. No bad indication of the character of the peasantry of any particular country is to be found in the situation of the hamlets and cottages; and in these respects the positions chosen by the people in that neighbourhood harmonized well with their ordinary tastes and feelings.

The soil in general was dry and wholesome, and that part which was given up to the production of timber was generally the broken ground which it would have been difficult to reduce to form and shape by any effort of the ploughshare. No regularity had prevailed in the art of planting during those remote centuries when the seeds of the oaks and beeches that grew around Castelneau were sown—if, indeed, the woods themselves were not remnants of the old primeval forests which once covered the whole face of the country—and thus the greatest picturesque beauty was to be found in the forest ground. The rest of the land, it is true, was very beautiful also; but often from the edges of the wood were to be seen bright glimpses of the open country, mingling with the fringe of green trees that skirted the hills, and combining many sorts of natural beauty in one. The climate, too, in that part of France, is peculiarly fine; and although so many rivers and springs appear in every direction, very little rain falls, and the heavy clouds that sometimes gather round, float slowly past to higher regions, and pour their showers upon the tops of the distant mountains. It thus becomes a land of gleams, where the sunshine and shadow seem constantly playing with each other, and running races over the green hill sides.

Amongst such scenes were passed the years of Annette de St. Morin, from the time she was ten years of age till the time she was eighteen; and, as I have stated before, those gleams, and woods, and hills, and valleys, and bright streams, had no unimportant part in her education. They fixed her tastes, and even in some degree formed her character.

Few of the châteaux in the neighbourhood of that of Castelneau were inhabited. Many were in ruins; and the two nearest houses, which dignified themselves with such a title, and which were yet tenanted by something better than bats and owls, lay at the distance of more than five miles from it and from each other. One of these was situated not far from the banks of the Loir, and was in every respect very different from the chateau of Castelneau. It had been built by a marquis, in the latter part of the reign of Louis XIV. and had been embellished by his successor under the regency. The genealogical tree of the family was said not to be one of the tallest in the forest, though the branches had become very numerous of late years; nor were the roots supposed to be very pure, at least no one had ever clearly ascertained into what soil they shot. The chateau itself was exactly what might be expected from the age in which it was built, and the person who built it. It was all glass within and without. The windows were like what are termed goggle eyes, much too large, in short, for the

size of the place. There were also a great number too many for the small masses of masonry that supported them; and to make these masses look the more flimsy, the skilful artist had not contented himself till he had covered them with plaster panels and arabesques. Tall stone pinnacles and balls covered the tops of each of the piers; a whole host of Cupids had been squandered upon different parts of the stone-work, and innumerable baskets of flowers afforded the little god of love something to do. The house was seated upon a raised platform, and every means were employed by manifold flights of shallow steps to weary the visitor in approaching the dwelling of the Marquis de Cajare.

The interior resembled the outside in ornament and decoration. There was not a panel without some painting upon it, not in the best taste in the world; and the ceilings and staircases were filled with Neptunes and Apollos, Cupids and Venuses, Tritons and Nereides. Manifold looking-glasses ornamented the walls, and the columns that supported the ceilings were fluted with blue glass. In the winter-time the house would have been intolerably cold; but it was only during about three months in the very height of summer that the marquis and the marquise, after having talked to everybody in Paris of their chateau on the Lot, came down, with a select few of their acquaintances, to languish through the space allotted to a dull country life.

The family of the marquis consisted of himself and his wife, one son and one daughter. The latter was somewhat older than Annette de St. Morin; handsome, too, and not without a certain degree of cleverness, but full of frivolity, conceit and pretension. She had thus all the qualities requisite to attract the admiration of the youth of Paris; and people were beginning to marvel that Mademoiselle de Cajare, now approaching her twentieth year, had not formed some splendid alliance. However, things in general were managed in Paris at that time in a very different manner from the arrangements of the present day. The young lady had little or nothing to do in the affair but to submit, and all the other particulars were arranged between her parents and the person to be coupled to herself for life, or, more often still, between them and his parents. This, indeed, was not always the case; for there never yet was a time, either in France or any other country, in which love-matches were not occasionally made, as is shown by the very distinction drawn in the language between the *mariage d'amour* and the *mariage de convenance*.

It may be supposed, then, that in the society in which Mademoiselle de Cajare moved, the *mariage de convenance* was much more customary than any other sort of alliance; and it began to be rumoured in the circles of Paris, that the marquis himself had not been so explicit in naming the dowry of his daughter as was desirable to the young gallants of the capital. Yet he lived in the highest and most precise style; and his son, who was serving with the army on the Rhine, never found any want of means to gratify whatever whim or caprice might come into the head of a spoiled child of fortune.

The marquis himself was everything that had been the pink of perfection some thirty years before. He was, consequently, some-

what out of date, according to the manners of the day; and his graces had a degree of stiffness which occasionally excited the merriment of the *dégaçée* youth, which filled the saloons of the metropolis. The marquise was what the people of her own time called a sweet, interesting woman, as heartless as it was possible to conceive, and of course as selfish. She had a certain sort of common sense, or, rather, I should say, discernment about her, which made her perceive when she first set out in life, some six or seven-and-twenty years before, that as she had not enough ready wit to be *piquante*, she must assume the interesting and sentimental; and this having become her habitual style, she continued to languish and to sigh, and to look tender and beseeching, till all her charms began perceptibly to pass away, and the necessity of giving them a little heightening became more and more apparent every day. She took the hint which her looking-glass afforded; superinduced additional portions of red or white, in various places, as the case required; arranged the eyebrows with the nicest care, and added a lock here and there amongst her hair, where "time, who steals our years away," had stolen her tresses too.

Such was one of the chateaux in the neighbourhood of Castelneau, and such was the family to which it belonged. There was another, however, at about the same distance, in a different direction. It was situated in that higher, if not more mountainous district, about Fons and St. Medard, and was as much the reverse of the chateau of Cajare in its site and appearance, as in the character of its inhabitants. In the jargon of the country it was called Castel Nogent, and the name of the gentleman who inhabited it was the Baron de Nogent. He was at this time an old man, but older, indeed, in appearance than in reality, for care had had its hand upon him as well as time. His hair was as white as snow, and his figure, which had once been tall and powerful, was now thin and somewhat bent. He was not, however, more than sixty years of age; and his countenance, though worn and somewhat pale, bore a noble and lofty look; but withal there was an expression of melancholy, nay, of almost hopelessness, about it, which was permanent, mingling with every other expression, even with a smile.

The chateau was one of the old dwelling-houses of the country, not of so antique a date, indeed, as that of Castelneau, but still carrying its origin back for many centuries, and built upon the foundations of an older mansion, all record of the erection of which was lost in the lapse of time. It was not nearly so large as the chateau of Castelneau, and, indeed, never had been, but still it was a large building, and would have afforded ample accommodation for a numerous family and a splendid train. By such, however, it was not tenanted; for the baron himself had seen his wife, whom he had wedded from pure affection, and had never ceased to love, wither away ere she had been his more than four years, leaving him not exactly alone, for he had one son, but solitary in heart, and depressed by manifold misfortunes. The train of the baron, too, was very small; for his father had made great sacrifices for his king and for his country, and had, of course, met with neither reward nor remuneration. The baron, also, had suffered severe

losses of property from accidental causes; and the chateau, not being half filled, was falling in some parts into decay.

The scenery round it was very beautiful, full of woods, and rocks, and streams; and, in a part which had been formerly reserved as a hunting-park for the chateau itself, rose one of the heads of the small river Cere, rushing at once from a deep basin in the rock, in a jet of nearly four feet in diameter.

The Abbé de Castelneau, as soon as he assumed the title of count, and took possession of the castles and estates, was immediately visited, in great state, by all the gentry of the neighbourhood, with the exception of the Baron de Nogent. With grave and deliberate slowness he returned those visits, affording no great encouragement, either by his words or manner, to any attempt at intimacy. He waited for some time for the baron's call; but as that nobleman did not appear, he proceeded in his old post-chaise, drawn by the two mules, for which he retained an unwavering regard, to visit his solitary neighbour. The baron received him without any appearance of discomfort or surprise, but also without any show of pleasure.

"Monsieur de Nogent," said the count, "we of Castelneau, and you of Nogent, have been friends for two hundred years, and perhaps longer: I see not why it should not be so still."

"There is but one reason, count," replied the baron—"the house of Castelneau is rich, the house of Nogent is poor, and they meet not upon the same terms as in other days."

"If riches could make any difference in regard, sir," replied the count, "friendship would be a thing not worth the trouble of coming two leagues from Castelneau to seek. I have shown you that I value it more highly than you seem to do: if you do not really hold it lightly, you will come to Castelneau in return."

The baron smiled faintly. "I do not hold it lightly, indeed," he replied; "and since such are your feelings, Monsieur de Castelneau, I will, of course, return your visit, with pleasure. But I have so long avoided all society, from causes too painful for me to enter into, that I fear you will find but a dull and cheerless neighbour, though not from estimating friendship at a low rate, nor undervaluing high abilities when I meet with them."

Some farther conversation took place, and the count inquired after the baron's son, whom he remembered a beautiful boy some ten or twelve years before.

"He is now," replied the baron, "one of the king's pages, and I hope, ere another year be over, to hear that he is serving his country in the field."

The count wished the young gentleman success; and after remaining a reasonable time, in order to suffer all strangeness to wear off, he took his leave, and returned to the chateau of Castelneau. His visit called forth another immediately, from the baron, who spoke and acted with less reserve than he had previously done, and mentioned his intention of proceeding very soon to Paris, in order to see his son equipped for the army.

Not long after, the Count de Castelneau proceeded to the town of Cahors, for some time, to settle various matters of business connected with the inheritance which had just fallen to him. He took

Annette with him; and on their return, he found that the Baron de Nogent and his son had called during their absence. He returned the visit without a moment's loss of time; but he found the old nobleman now alone, his son having returned to Paris in order to join the army.

From that time forth, the years slipped by without any incident of importance chequering the intercourse between the Baron de Nogent and the Count de Castelneau. They met, sometimes twice, sometimes three times in the course of each year, but not oftener; and towards the latter end of the eighteen years of which we have lately been speaking, when the baron visited the chateau of Castelneau, his eyes would frequently rest for a moment upon the beautiful countenance of Annette de St. Morin, with a look of thoughtful inquiry, as if something puzzled him, and set his mind busily to work.

CHAPTER XI.

As each human heart is a world in itself, and we have in this book more than one heart to deal with, it would take a whole constellation of such books to describe with any degree of minuteness and precision all the different points and particulars of the characters we have had under review, and the changes which took place therein in the space of the eighteen years so frequently referred to. We have done our best, however, in a short space, to give some idea of the characters of the Count of Castelneau and his adopted child, Annette de St. Morin, together with a general view of the circumstances which surrounded them; and however imperfectly all this may have been accomplished, it is time that we should proceed to make the personages speak and act for themselves.

We have told the generous reader, who is quite willing to believe that everything we do tell him is true, that, during the three or four hours in the middle of the day which the Count de Castelneau thought fit to spend alone in solitary thought, Mademoiselle de St. Morin would wander forth through the bright scenery in the neighbourhood. During these excursions she was sometimes on horseback, followed by numerous attendants; for although the count was so simple in all his own habits, he never suffered her to want any of the outward appearances of rank and high station, but often on foot, and then generally unaccompanied. She was fond of indulging her own thoughts; and, though sometimes the sunny side of the breezy hill would fill her with high spirits, and tempt her to gallop her fleet Limousin jennet for many a mile over the broken turf, yet, towards eighteen years of age, she generally returned ere long to the more thoughtful mood, and wiled away the hours with fancies of her own. It may be asked, what were those fancies? I cannot tell: nor could she herself have told. All the small particulars that she knew of the world, and of nature, and of her own heart, danced in the light of a happy mind, like motes in a ray of sunshine. Each glittered as it passed through the beam, disappeared, and was forgotten; but others still succeeded, and all derived brilliance from the cheerful ray through which they floated, so long as they were within its influence.

There might be, at those times, within that young bosom the wish to be beloved by some kindred spirit, filled with bright thoughts and high aspirations like her own. Such things might well and naturally be in her heart; for it had been a principle of him who had taught her all which she knew, to set her the example of that truth which he required from her, and to deceive her in nothing. He strove, to the very best of his power, to give to all things their right estimate; and he sought not in any degree to conceal from her that love was before her as an inevitable part of her destiny; a thing that was to form an epoch in her existence, though not to absorb within itself the thoughts and feelings of her life. He guarded her mind from dwelling upon that idea, it is true. by supplying her with plenty of other matter for thought; but still youth, and nature, and all those sweet and bright, but vague and shadowy, hopes, which form the atmosphere of love, might well have place within her breast.

She was thus one day wandering on, at the distance of a few miles from the chateau of Castelneau, when feeling somewhat weary with the warmth of a bright day in the end of May, she sat down to rest on a cushion of green moss that rose round the silvery roots of a tall beech tree in the woods. At the distance of perhaps twenty yards from where she sat was a small, narrow, sandy road, leading through the woods from Maridal to Figeac; and, flowing along, on the other side of the road, was a bright clear stream, which a few miles farther on plunged into the Lot. The beech tree was one of peculiar beauty, with long bending arms drooping over the ground below, as if to canopy that mossy cushion from the sun; and, up behind again, sloped far away the green bank, studded here and there with old trees casting deep shadows round them, but leaving bright gleams of sunshine upon the more open expanse of forest turf. On the right, about twenty yards from the spot where Annette sat, and at the same distance from the road, was an old Gothic cross with a Latin inscription upon it, and at its foot appeared a fountain in a stone basin, richly ornamented by some hand which had long been dust.

I have dwelt on the description of this scene for many reasons, but for none more than because in it occurred more than one event affecting the happiness of Annette de St. Morin. Thus often does it happen in the strange mysterious existence of man, that certain spots seem to have a fate attached to them, sometimes as the scenes of those greater events that affect nations and worlds, sometimes only as the places where occurrences, marking the particular destiny of individuals, happen from time to time. How many a field of battle has seen various contending armies pass over them at far remote periods! how many houses and palaces contain within them the record of many a great and terrible event! How often does it happen to us individually, that on the same spot, where the course of our existence has once been changed by some of the great marking occurrences of life, we have again and again met with change of fortune for good or for evil!

Annette de St. Morin sat there and listened; and if anything at that time in the whole expanse of her sunny mind could bear the name of gloom, we might say that she was more melancholy than

usual. The subject of her thoughts was serious. As she looked at the bright stream that flowed by her, it presented to her mind, as the rippling course of a river, ~~was~~ naturally done to almost every one when gazing on it intently, an image of human life; and the bright waters, as they flowed by her, seemed to carry on her thoughts into the future. What was to be her own fate and destiny? She asked herself; where the dark and unseen end of that existence, which now passed as brightly and peacefully as the sparkling waters before her eyes? Then again her mind turned to the past; and like one gazing up towards the top of a mountain, she could trace step by step the way back towards infancy, where gradually all minute objects were blended together, and the eyes of memory rested at last upon a faint blue point scarcely distinguishable from the sky.

As she was thus thinking, perhaps asking her own heart who were her parents, what her faith by birth, and what her previous history, the noise of wheels, and the voice of a driver encouraging his horses, were heard at some little distance in the wood. Those sounds roused Annette from her reverie, but did not in any degree scare or alarm her. All was so peaceful in the country round; violence and wrong were so seldom heard of in that district, that she entertained no apprehension of any kind, and only drawing the veil which was over her head, somewhat more closely round her face, she sat still while the carriage came slowly forward, watching it with some degree of interest as it approached.

It was a plain but handsome vehicle, according to the fashion of that day, with tall flat sides and a moulding at the top; and it was drawn, as was then customary, by four horses, driven by one coachman; but what was somewhat strange for a vehicle of that kind, no lackey appeared, either beside the driver or at the back of the carriage. The sandiness of the road seemed the cause of the slowness of its progression, for the vehicle was weighty, and the wheels sunk deep in the soft ground. The horses, however, were strong, and appeared quite able to draw it to the firmer road which lay about a mile farther on; but just as the carriage was passing the spot where Annette sat, a gentleman put his head out of the window, and bade the coachman stop and let the horses rest awhile.

The driver immediately obeyed, and dismounted from his box; and the gentleman who had spoken opened the door of the carriage and got out. Had he been a young man, or a man of gay aspect, Annette de St. Morin might have felt inclined to rise and wend her way homeward; but such was not at all the case, and she remained quietly seated where she was, thinking that in a minute or two the vehicle would move on.

The gentleman who had descended from the carriage seemed to be between forty and fifty years of age, but nearer to the latter than the former period: he was tall, well proportioned and graceful, but his hair, which had once been very dark, was thickly mingled with grey. His countenance was good, and not gloomy, though thoughtful; and his dress, which was black, was of the best materials, and made in the best fashion. As soon as he had set his foot to the ground, he offered his hand to a lady who was

within, and who likewise descended from the vehicle. She was considerably younger than himself, apparently about five or six and thirty years of age; and as Annette's eyes rested upon her, she thought that she had never beheld a more interesting being. She was still very beautiful, though the first graces of youth were past; and there was an expression of sadness on her countenance, which, though it could not exactly be said to harmonize with the style of her features, was perhaps the more touching from appearing on a face well calculated to express gay and joyous lightness of heart.

The lady spoke a few words to the gentleman beside her, which Annette did not hear, and the eyes of both fixed for a moment upon Mademoiselle de St. Morin. As they saw, however, that she averted her face, and made a movement as if to rise and depart, they both turned towards the fountain and the cross, and the lady knelt before the latter, and appeared to repeat a prayer. The gentleman had turned round twice to look at Annette; and in the meantime a second lady, extremely well dressed, but by no means bearing the distinguished air of the other, had come forth from the carriage, and was gazing likewise at the fair girl who was seated on the bank.

This double scrutiny somewhat discomposed Mademoiselle de St. Morin, and she now rose for the purpose of returning to the chateau; but at that moment the gentleman approached her with rapid steps, and bowing low, with an uncovered head, he said, "I beg a thousand pardons for interrupting you, but allow me to ask, if, in passing along this road, we do not go very near to the fine old chateau of Castelneau?"

There was something so respectful and courteous in the gentleman's tone, that if Annette had felt anything like annoyance at being gazed at, it passed away immediately, and she replied with a smile, "You go directly before the gates on the way to Figear. In fact, you can go no other way."

"Can you tell me," continued the gentleman, looking back to the lady, who had now finished her prayer, and was approaching, "Can you tell me if strangers may be permitted to see the interior of it without disturbing the family, which I believe is numerous?"

"Nay, you are mistaken," answered Annette; "the family is anything but numerous, consisting only of the count and Mademoiselle de St. Morin."

"Mademoiselle de St. Morin," said the gentleman again, "is, I think——"

"A ward of the Count de Castelneau," replied Annette; "but I must not let you go on farther," she added; "I am Annette de St. Morin."

The lady who had been kneeling before the cross, during the latter part of this brief dialogue, had come close to the speakers; and Annette, though looking principally towards the person who addressed her, had remarked a strange degree of agitation in his female companion. She was not a little surprised and confounded, however, when at the words she had last spoken, the lady, giving way to some internal emotion, which seemed suddenly to overpower all

her efforts to resist it—cast herself upon Annette's neck, and kissing her again and again, mingling her caresses with many tears, in which joy and sorrow had both evidently a part.

In vain the gentleman who accompanied her laid his hand upon her arm, saying, "Remember, oh, remember!" and the other lady coming up, exclaimed, "Have a care, dear madam, have a care!" The lady's emotions were evidently not to be restrained; and she wept upon Annette's bosom, sobbing as if her heart would break, and from time to time pressing her lips upon her cheek and upon her brow. Then again she would dash the drops from her eyes, and gaze in the young lady's face, and then would burst into tears, and lean her head upon her shoulder. On her part, as may well be supposed, Annette was agitated as well as surprised. She knew not, she could not divine what was the cause of the emotion that she beheld; but yet there was something in that lady's look, and tone, and manner, which wakened strange feelings in her heart: feelings of tenderness, and interest, and affection, which she could not account for; and being greatly moved, all she could say was, "What is it? I pray tell me, what is it? What is the meaning of all this?"

Nobody answered her for some time; while the gentleman whispered a few words from time to time to the lady who was thus strangely agitated, and endeavoured gently to draw her away. At length, however, he said, in reply to Annette's repeated question, "You are very like this lady's daughter, mademoiselle, whose name was Annette also; so that the sight of you, and the sound of that name, have troubled her a little. She seems to forget for the time that you are not the young lady she lost. She will be better in a moment or two, and then will be sorry for having agitated you."

Annette looked at the lady's dress, and thought that of the gentleman might certainly pass for mourning, his fair companion was habited in all the bright and delicate colours which were then fashionable in the Parisian world. There was not much time, however, for observation, for the lady now seemed to recover herself; and gazing upon Annette with a look of sad but deep interest, she said, in a tone of greater composure, "I beg your pardon, young lady; I fear I have agitated you. You look like one that is very happy, and I pray to God that you may never know unhappiness."

"I am very happy," replied Annette, "and I can scarcely foresee anything that should make me unhappy, for I have the kindest and best of guardians, who leaves nothing undone to insure my present and my future happiness."

"Is he kind to you?" exclaimed the lady eagerly; "is he kind to you? Then may God of heaven bless him! may heaven bless," she added, more composedly, "every one who is kind to those who are placed under their charge!"

As she thus spoke, the gentleman again whispered something to her, and seemed to urge her eagerly, for she replied, at length, "Well, well, I will come; but remember, it is but a moment out of a life;" and again turning to Annette, she added, "Forgive me, sweet girl, if I have frightened and agitated you: we shall meet again, I trust, some time, even in this world, so pray remember me."

"I will, indeed, dear lady," replied Annette; "but by what name can I remember you?"

The gentleman held up his finger to her, as if to beg her to ask no questions; and the lady, after gazing in her face earnestly, once more embraced her, kissing her cheek again and again. Then turning away with bitter tears, she re-entered the carriage, merely murmuring the words "Adieu! adieu!" The other lady then kissed Annette's cheek likewise, saying, in a low tone, "You may some day know more;" and the gentleman, returning from the side of the carriage, bade her adieu respectfully ere he withdrew.

When he had handed in the last of the two ladies, Annette was not a little surprised to hear him turn to the coachman and say, as if he were thoroughly acquainted with every step of the country round, "As soon as you have passed the castle gates, take the second broad-road to the left, and go off as fast as you can till you reach the town of Maur."

Thus saying, he sprang into the vehicle, shut the door behind him, and the coachman driving on, the whole party were soon out of sight. Annette walked slowly back to the chateau, to tell the Count of Castelnau what had occurred; but, to her surprise, she found that, contrary to his usual habits, he had gone out on horse-back in the middle of the day, and had not even said when he would return.

CHAPTER XII.

It was many hours before the count returned to the chateau: when he did so, he entered the room where Annette was sitting, with his usual calm and sedate step, and with a brow on which it was scarcely possible to perceive that there was any emotion, either angry, sorrowful, or joyous. As much as he ever smiled, he smiled on greeting the child of his adoption; but as soon as he had seated himself, he despatched the servant who threw open the door of the saloon for him, to summon the porter of the great gates to his presence. The count had passed the man as he entered; and the summons seemed to him so strange, and was so unusual, that though his master was kind and placable, he turned somewhat pale at the thought of having excited his anger.

"Who has been here since I went out, Victor?" said the count, in a mild tone, as soon as he appeared.

"No one, my lord," replied the porter; "not a soul has passed the gates but mademoiselle, and the boy from the fish-ponds with some fine carp."

"Indeed," replied the count; "bethink yourself, Victor; for I wish you to be very accurate."

The man still remained firm in the same story, however, and the count then asked if the boy from the fish-ponds had gone back again.

"Oh! yes, directly, my lord," replied the porter. "When he had passed the gates and crossed the court, he took the fish to the wicket at the buttery door, where François, the cook's man, took them from him, and he came back directly."

The count mused for a moment or two, and then inquired,

"Have you remarked any one pass by the gates of the chateau? I saw the fresh marks of carriage-wheels as I came along the road."

"There was a carriage, my lord, about three hours ago," replied the porter, "with three brown horses and a grey one."

"What were the colours of the liveries?" said the count.

"There were no liveries at all, monseigneur," replied the porter. "The coachman had a grey coat on, and a club wig as thick as my arm; but there was not a single lacquy with the coach."

In answer to some further questions from his master, he proceeded to say that the vehicle had driven past as fast as possible, without pausing for a moment, even to let the party which it contained take a view of the castle, which was a high misdemeanour in the porter's eyes: the chateau of Castelneau, being, in his estimation, the very finest edifice that the skill and ingenuity of man ever succeeded in raising from the earth. The information, however, seemed to satisfy the count, who nodded his head, saying—"That will do;" and the porter, well contented with the event of his interrogation, retired from the presence of his lord.

Annette had longed to speak, and detail all she knew of the people in the carriage; but natural courtesy had prevented her from interrupting the count till he had done, and then, before she could speak, he turned to her, saying, "Something very strange has occurred to me to-day, Annette."

"And to me, also," she replied, with a smile; "but I interrupt you, my dear father. What were you saying?"

"Merely," he answered, "that something very strange has occurred, which, unless it be explained hereafter, I suppose I must look upon as the silliest of all idle jests. I received a letter almost immediately after you left me yesterday, calling me to Figene upon important business. The matter to be treated of—namely, the purchase of the neighbouring estate of Merle—was distinctly mentioned. My own lawyer and notary, I was told, would both meet me at the inn; and, in fact, there was no room to suspect that I was deceived. I therefore set out as the letter requested me, but found nobody waiting, and no sign of preparation for my coming. This struck me as strange; but after waiting half an hour, lest men should say I am impatient, I sent for the notary, who lives in the town, you know, and then found that he had not the slightest acquaintance with the matter. The lawyer was then sent for, and as he lives as far off as Lavignac, I was detained long before he came. When he did at length appear, I found he was as ignorant of the whole transaction as the notary, and, mounting my horse, I rode back hither as fast as possible. But say, my dear child, what is this strange thing that has happened to you, which you thus speak of? You have not been robbed, I trust, my Annette? For one can surely walk forth in peace on the banks of the Selle, if anywhere."

"Oh! no," replied Annette, "nothing of that kind, but something, if not as unpleasant, at least as unusual;" and she proceeded to relate all that had occurred to her. If she softened anything, it was not intentionally, and the count obtained a very accurate knowledge of all that had taken place.

As he listened, his countenance for once was moved; and An-

nette could see much agitation in his look; more, indeed, than she had ever seen upon his face before. Ere she had done, the count had started up from his seat, and began pacing up and down the room. Annette was astonished and alarmed to see such emotion in one so calm; and rising also, she approached and twined her beautiful arms round her father by adoption, saying in an anxious tone, "I fear that my story has grieved you: I hope I have not done wrong."

"Far from it, my dear child," replied the count; "you could but act as you did act; but still, there may be many matters in the tale that may and that do grieve me. You know, Annette, that you are not my child; you know, however, that you are as much the child of my love as if you were one of my own offspring, and you can guess how terrible it would be for me to lose you."

"Oh, but that will never be!" cried Annette; "you do not think that anybody could persuade me to leave you?"

The abbe looked in her face and smiled. He smiled, partly because the assurance gave him pleasure, and yet, strange to say, it was partly because he knew how vain such an assurance was. He did not deceive himself; he knew the time might come, and probably would come, when even deeper and stronger affections than those which bound Annette to him would take possession of her heart, and when, without loving him less, she would love another more, and of course follow the strongest attachment. He smiled, however, kindly; and as he gazed in that lovely face for a moment, sensations, regrets, visions, if they may be so called, crossed his mind, from which he instantly turned away his thoughts. In that brief space of time, however, the tempting spirit which ever lies at the bottom of the human heart, seized the moment of tenderness to whisper, that he might have been very happy with Annette, not as the child of his adoption, but as the bride of his heart, if years and circumstances had permitted such a thing to be possible. It is a peculiar characteristic of all the suggestions of the dark and subtle enemy of God and man, that each word which the heart is weak enough to receive is written in characters of flame that can never be erased, but which still remain clear and distinct whenever the mind rests upon them; till line after line is added thereunto by the persevering fiend, and the temptation becomes overpowering and complete. This was the first time that such a thought had ever crossed the count's mind, and he instantly turned away his eyes from it as if it were an absolute profanation. He almost scorned himself to have admitted the very idea of it into his mind; yet it had an effect upon him, but that effect was, for the time at least, noble, and high, and pure. From that day forth he became somewhat less familiar with his adopted child. He would kiss her brow and cheek when they met or when they parted, but he touched not her lips; he held her not to his bosom, as he had been accustomed to do; he felt as if it would be unholy so to do, after that thought had once entered into his heart: and though it was a painful punishment for one involuntary idea, yet he regarded it as a penance, and endured it with firmness. But he did more, as we shall soon see when I return to the course of the story, which I have somewhat outrun already.

It very rarely happens, indeed, that a conversation of great interest proceeds to its close without interruption. There seems a fatality in it; and every one must have felt how trifles of the most unimportant kind, how importunate babblers and frivolous coxcombs, are constantly permitted, or sent by fate, to break in upon those conferences on which hangs the weal or woe of our whole existence. The conversation between the Count de Castelneau and Mademoiselle de St. Morin had just reached the point at which we stopped in detailing it, when, from the window of the saloon, the count beheld a carriage with six beautiful horses, together with manifold lacqueys on horseback and on foot, enter the gates which had been thrown open to admit them, and pass onward across the court to the principal door of the chateau.

His countenance resumed all its calmness in a moment. "This is the family of Cajare, Annette," he said. "I heard they had arrived when I was at Figeac; but I dreamed not they would have made us a visit to-day, and could well have spared it. We must do the best to entertain them, however; for courtesy is a duty, my dear child, even to those we do not like or esteem."

"Oh! I dislike Madame de Cajare very much," said Annette.

"And I her husband as much," replied the abbe.

Speeches like these but too often precede in the false and hollow-hearted world in which we live, the entrance of visitors who are received with the most marked and flattering attention, with bright smiles and professions of delight. Such, however, was not the case with the Count de Castelneau and Annette de St. Morin. The first advanced to meet his guests with slow and stately politeness, inquired after the health of the marquis and marchioness, trusted they had been well since he had seen them, now a period of two years, and hoped that they had greatly enjoyed the pleasures of Paris, but did not even express pleasure at seeing them.

"Ah, Monsieur de Castelneau," said the lady, in a languid tone, "you know that these dreadful vapours from which I suffer, never leave much happiness. If there be any thing that I can hope for in life, it is but to pass the rest of my days in a gentle melancholy, without being assailed by any deep grief or great misfortune. Ah! Mademoiselle de St. Morin, how charming you are! I declare you become more lovely every day. Why, during the last few months what a change and improvement have taken place in your beauty!"

Annette coloured slightly, and replied courteously, but still coldly. The marchioness, however, who was always quite satisfied with every thing she did herself, perceived in Annette's manner but that graceful indifference which is always cultivated in courts and great cities by those persons who, having nothing in heart or mind to distinguish them, are forced to make the most of those accidental circumstances of rank and fortune which they either really possess or assume. Such, indeed, was the combination of graces of person and demeanour, with a chilling coldness which could not be concealed, in Annette's reception of the Marchioness de Cajare, that the latter lady marvelled in her own heart, and asked herself where that country girl could have acquired such a distinguished air and manner.

While the two ladies had thus been conversing, Monsieur de

Castelneau had been engaged in paying some attention to the marquis; and he now turned round, saying to Annette, "My dear child, we are to be honoured with the company of Monsieur and Madame de Cajare to-night: they will do us the honour of supping with us, and sleeping at the chateau. You had better, therefore, summon good Donnine, and give orders that apartments be immediately prepared for our distinguished guests."

Madame de Cajare and Monsieur de Cajare made a thousand formal apologies; declared that Mademoiselle de St. Morin would think them the most rude and unceremonious people in the world; but explained that they were on their way to pay a visit to the small town of Fons, and that one of their horses having cast a shoe, and detained them till that late hour, Madame de Cajare was far too timid to pass through the woods in the growing obscurity which was now fast falling over the world.

This statement might be true, or it might not, but the Count de Castelneau certainly did not believe it. However, old Donnine, having been summoned to Annette's aid, now appeared in a gown of rich silk brocade, attired with infinitely more smartness than her mistress, though withal in garments well suited to her age: and Annette, having spoken a word or two to her faithful old attendant, quitted the room with her for a moment, to insure that everything should be done to make their unexpected guests comfortable.

As soon as the young lady and the good old nurse were gone, Madame de Cajare exclaimed, "What a charming creature!" and the count, with a certain spice of malice, which remained from his former habits, notwithstanding all his efforts, chose to misunderstand, and applied the words of the marchioness to the good old Donnine.

"A very charming creature, indeed," he replied, in a grave and somewhat solemn tone: "she was first my ward's nurse, and has since been raised to the dignity of *gouvernante* of the chateau."

The marchioness explained, and the count bowed, but gave no farther encouragement to the praises of Annette. The evening passed by, upon the whole, cheerfully: the marquis himself, if he could not be called either a gay, a witty, or a sensible man, being overloaded with the phrases and the common-places of the world and the times, there was no subject on earth with regard to which he could not say something; and being neither diffident of his own powers nor slow in delivering his own opinions, he himself supplied conversation wherever he went. He neither required nor accepted much assistance, very often answering his own questions as soon as they were asked; and the count found it very easy to entertain a person who was thus willing to play two hands in a game of chit-chat with himself. The marquis tried hard, in the course of the evening, to induce his host to play with him; for gambling, was at that time a disease in the city of Paris, with which Monsieur de Cajare was very much afflicted. The count, however, remained firm, and declined, saying, with one of his doubtful smiles, that he had left off gaming when he quitted the church. The want of that sort of entertainment might have made the evening seem somewhat long to the guests of the chateau de Castelneau, had not the marchioness, who perhaps might have some suspicion

that her husband wished for a private conversation with his entertainer, retired to her apartment, almost immediately after supper, accompanied by Mademoiselle de St. Morin, to do the honour of the house.

No sooner was she gone than Monsieur de Cajare laid regular siege to the mind of the count, seeking to draw from him, by one means or another, some account of Annette and her prospects in life. He began by accounting for the absence of his daughter, who would be so delighted, he assured the count, to cultivate the acquaintance of Mademoiselle de St. Morin, by stating that she had remained at the chateau of Cajare in order to receive her brother, the baron, who was expected every hour from Paris. He then proceeded once more to comment upon Annette's beauty; but the count listened in silence, without even replying by a look.

At length the marquis ventured upon a bold stroke, and exclaimed, as if he had known well the person of whom he was speaking, "Ah, poor Monsieur de St. Morin! he was in very bad circumstances, I fear, when he died."

"Annette's father was not rich," replied the count.

"I feared so, I feared so," said the marquis. "He was an excellent man."

"A very good man, indeed," replied the count, with the same cynical smile.

"I fear he has not left her very well provided for," said the marquis.

Monsieur de Castelneau had a very great inclination not to answer at all, as he saw clearly through the views and purposes with which these suppositions were put forward. The evil spirit did not lose the opportunity, and instantly suggested the question, "Shall I promote by any means, even by a word, the estrangement and the separation from myself, of a being who has been for eighteen years the sunshine of my home and the light of my eyes? Shall I aid in uniting her to another by those tender ties which can never bind her to me?" But then the better spirit resumed its sway in a moment, and he said to himself, "Why should I stay it? Why should I retard it even by a minute? Would I deprive her of all those blessings that I myself have never known: home, and happiness, and sweet domestic love? Would I thus repay her for having given comfort and consolation, ay, and almost even cheerfulness, to a wrung and sorrowful heart during eighteen years? No, no! Though, if this man's son be like the father, she is no bride for him, yet I may as well make it known to the greedy and covetous world, that she is not the dowerless creature that people suppose."

Thought, which, like the fairy, compasses the round earth, "ere the leviathan can swim a league," had been as rapid as usual in conveying all these ideas through the mind of the count; so that the marquis remarked nothing further than one of those slight pauses which often preceded the reply of Monsieur de Castelneau to anything that was said.

"I really do not know," replied the count, at length, "what you consider not well provided for, Monsieur de Cajare. A gentleman of your great wealth and importance may consider Annette's for-

tune a mere trifle; but her dower will amount, at least, to sixty thousand livres per annum, perhaps to more; and that will always enable her, as a single woman, to live in comfort, even if she should not marry."

"Oh! but she will marry to a certainty, monsieur," exclaimed Monsieur de Marquis de Cajare, whose eyes sparkled with eagerness to secure the prize for his son: "I am sure you could make an advantageous match for her at any time you thought fit to seek it."

"I shall in no degree seek it, Monsieur de Cajare," replied the count, quickly, in order to prevent the other from saying more at that moment. "You know I was some time ago in the neighbouring country of England. They are a strange, mad-headed people, as you are well aware. Torn to pieces by sects and factions in policy and religion, yet amongst other odd notions, they have a belief, not universal, but very general amongst them, that a woman has something to do with her own marriage, and that it is consequently better to consult her inclinations. This I believe to be the reason why, in England, one man's wife is not always another man's mistress, as in France.* I liked the system so much, that I long ago determined Mademoiselle de St. Morin should marry whom she liked, and nobody but whom she liked; reserving to myself, as her guardian, the right of refusing her to any one whose morals, temper, or habits were certain to make her unhappy:—but you seem tired, Monsieur de Cajare, and would, I am sure, wish to retire. Allow me to show you the way. Jean! Pierre! Mathieu! here, bring lights. Lights for Monsieur le Marquis de Cajare;" and then, after conducting Monsieur de Cajare to his apartments with the most formal politeness, he retired to his own chamber with his usual quiet step.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE Marquis de Cajare did not quit the chateau of Castelneau without pressing the count and his fair ward to visit his dwelling. Somewhat to Annette's surprise, the count did not hesitate a moment, but accepted the invitation at once, fixed the day for the visit, and seemed well disposed to be on terms of intimacy with a family with which she knew he despised at heart. This sudden change in one whose character and demeanour showed in general an unalterable firmness, might well appear strange to poor Annette; but the secret was that, as we have shown, Monsieur de Castelneau had undergone a struggle with himself, and had gained a triumph.

In such circumstances, there are few men who do not suffer the first moment of victory to carry them too far; and at that time the count would willingly have given the hand of the fair girl whom he had brought up from infancy to any worthy man who sought it. Feelings of this kind, however, are generally as evanescent as they are strong; and before the third morning after the departure of the

* It must be remembered, that this cynical observation of Monsieur de Castelneau applied to the morals of a century ago, and even then was a great deal too general and sweeping, although quite in character with his sarcastic habit of expression, as will be seen whenever "The Maxims of the Count de Castelneau" shall be given to the public.

marquis and his family had arrived, the count began to regret the promise he had given.

The following day was to be spent at Cajare, and Monsieur de Castelneau would not make any false excuse; but he could not help commenting to Annette, in a few sarcastic words, upon the character of those they were about to visit. The marquis, he said, was a charlatan in his follies as well as in his wit; the marchioness as much a quack in sentiment as her husband was in the want of it. "I have had opportunities of seeing," he continued, "that this vice is hereditary. His father was the same as himself: the daughter has lost nothing of the gift by transmission. It is clearly an heirloom, and the only one in the family: the son, surely, cannot be without it."

Annette made no reply, for it was seldom that she saw her kind guardian in such a mood, and she loved him less in it. In truth, he had carefully restrained his own sarcastic nature ever since Annette had been with him; for he was unwilling to show her, in one whom she loved and revered, an example of anything that he did not wish her to adopt. After a moment's pause, however, he added, "It would not surprise me, my Annette, if this youth were to become a suitor for your hand."

Annette smiled, and shook her head. There is an instinctive perception, regarding all the natural affections, in the mind of women, which, though they often willingly blind themselves to ardent love, as we shut our eyes against the full sunshine, yet shows them many a finer shade and more delicate hue of the same passion in a moment, be it concealed however it may. In the few words the count had spoken, Annette perceived, at once, that there were apprehensions in his bosom lest she should be sought and won by the young Baron de Cajare; and though she tried not to investigate why the thought might be painful to him—whether, because he thought the suitor unworthy of her, or because he liked not the prospect of losing her society—that answering smile and shake of the head spoke plainly, and were intended to speak, "There is no fear he should succeed."

The count understood the smile, and bent down his eyes upon the ground with a meditative look, not very well satisfied that even a part of his feelings should be detected, and more determined than ever to overcome them. But as the evil spirit is well aware that man's mind is a texture of ideas, he is quite satisfied with adding new ones of an evil kind, and working them intimately in and out, as the weaver works into the warp the thread upon his shuttle. Every time that the mind rests upon wrong, a new throw of that shuttle is taken, and the thread that it bears is the more thoroughly blended with the whole web of our thoughts.

On the subsequent day, early in the morning, the count and his adopted child set forth, and about an hour afterwards reached the great house of glass and gilding, called the Chateau de Cajare. Their approach had been observed by the inhabitants; and on the steps leading up to the chief entrance, appeared the Marquis de Cajare himself, with a young man of some six or seven-and-twenty years of age, splendidly dressed in the military costume of the day. He was handsome in countenance, graceful in person, not the least

like the Marquis de Cajare in any respect; and with an expression which, though not particularly marked in any way, was decidedly agreeable and prepossessing. He was rather grave than otherwise: there was none of the light smile about his lip which generally characterized the vain youth of the metropolis; and as he bowed low on being introduced to the count and Mademoiselle de St. Morin, and followed with the former, while his father led the latter, into the chateau by the tips of the fingers, his calm and gentlemanly demeanour, his handsome person, and superior tone of manners, made the count feel ten times more uncomfortably than if he had displayed all the idle frivolity and licentious emptiness of a *petit maitre* of those days.

Still, however, the Count de Castelnau struggled against such emotions; and as he walked on slowly up the steps, answering little more than monosyllables to the courteous words which the young officer addressed to him, he might be seen once or twice to close his teeth hard, as if to keep down the feelings that were within him. Before they had passed the threshold of the chateau, however, he had again triumphed over himself, and with admirable patience suffered himself to be led by Madame de Cajare and her daughter to take breakfast in a *bosquet*, which the marchioness informed him was dedicated to love and pensiveness. There was a fountain and an urn, and two or three Cupids, very naked, and somewhat over-fat about the lower part of the back, and there were inscriptions in verse below from the flowing pen of Mademoiselle de Cajare. The metre was not very good, nor the poetry; but there was a certain spice of wit in the composition, which was employed in such a manner as to leave the reader in doubt whether the fair writer was laughing at the Cupids or not.

Monsieur de Castelnau, on his part, read the verses, and treated them much in the same way as mademoiselle treated the Cupids, commenting upon them in a strain which left it very doubtful whether he did or did not admire them.

In the meantime, Annette, after having been welcomed in rap-
ture by Mademoiselle de Cajare, had been conducted to the *bosquet* by the marquis. His son, also, had fallen back to her side; and though he did not press any very great attentions upon her, yet all he did say was gentlemanly and high-toned. Annette was struck and pleased; and certainly, if the Count de Castelnau had contrived a plan for making her fall in love with the Baron de Cajare, he could not have laid out the events more cunningly for that purpose, than by drawing such a picture of that gentleman as he had suggested to her mind, and then presenting such an extraordinary contrast in reality. Annette de St. Morin, however—though, from her inexperience, from the warmth and tenderness of her heart, from a bright imagination, and a thousand other qualities of the mind, she might very well fall in love at first sight—paradoxical as it may seem, was not one to fall in love easily. It required many high qualities to win her affection, though her love would have been given in a moment, as soon as her heart was satisfied that those qualities were really possessed. Such was not the case with Monsieur de Cajare: though, in manners, appearance, conduct, he was altogether different from what she had expected, his

conversation did not afford a sufficient insight into his thoughts to convince her that the heart was high, and noble, and generous, the mind bright, pure, and unsullied.

No event of importance took place throughout the day: to Annette it passed happily and cheerfully enough, indeed, more so than any day she had spent in general society; for her happiest hours had always been those which she had passed with her father by adoption. The young officer, who contrived now to be a good deal by her side, had evidently a finished and refined taste, had an intimate acquaintance with the works of art in various countries, and had seen and known many of the most distinguished men of the day. He expressed his opinions, and he communicated his information, pleasantly and unobtrusively; and withal, he had that intelligent look, that meaning smile, which seem to pre-suppose a familiarity with our thoughts and feelings, and soon make friends with the spirit within us.

Annette, on her part, neither encouraged nor repelled his attention; but, as I have said, the day passed pleasantly for her, till she saw very evidently that the Count de Castelneau was uneasy. She did not fully understand why this should be, but felt inclined to believe that he knew more of the Baron de Cajaro than he stated, and that what he did know was disadvantageous to that young nobleman. As soon as she perceived this, she listened with less satisfaction to the baron's conversation, and attached herself more closely to the side of the count. Monsieur de Castelneau remarked that she did so, and was pleased, it must be acknowledged, at the result; but at the same time, was rather mortified that she had discovered his uneasiness. He did not wish that uneasiness to be perceived, and would only have prevented her conversing farther with the young officer upon the condition of doing so without appearing to do it. To remove the impression as much as possible, however, his warmth of manner towards the baron increased as Annette became more cold; and he ended, ere they took their departure, by inviting him in a hospitable tone to the chateau of Castelneau. The young officer bowed, and promised to take advantage of the invitation; but the next day passed over without his coming, and the next. The third day he appeared; and the count, pleased with his apparent indifference, treated him hospitably, and gave him no discouragement.

Advanced thus far, the Baroff de Cajaro did not fail to press his acquaintance more rapidly; sometimes he saw the count alone, sometimes the count and Annette; but there grew a tenderness in his manner towards Mademoiselle de St. Morin, a softness in his voice, a look of deep and thoughtful interest, which every time that the count saw him, made his heart ache with painful anticipations. He struggled boldly and firmly against his own feelings, however. He compared himself firmly with the young baron; and when he asked himself which was best calculated to win and to retain the love of a young, bright, ardent being, like Annette de St. Morin, he could not but acknowledge that it was not himself, though he felt within him depth of feeling and powers of mind which he knew the other did not possess. He determined that he would do nothing to stay the course of events; but every step in their progress

now gave him agony. Although many painful thoughts were but too familiar with his mind, these seemed more painful still, or, at all events, piled up as they were upon other things, they seemed to render the load upon his bosom intolerable, and yet he would not fly from those thoughts; but, on the contrary, gave himself up to them in manifold solitary and painful fits of musing. He would walk forth long by himself, he would shut himself in his chamber from all society, even from that of Annette. He would ride out far through the lonely woods, or over the wild hills and moors, and he would commune with and task his own heart, and accuse himself of gross, and bitter, and shameful selfishness; and often would he ask himself whether it were really possible that he was animated by any coarse and common passion towards a creature so pure, so sweet, so good, whom he had loved as his own child from infancy up to womanhood.

There, however, his own heart acquitted him, and the judge was just. No, he said, all that he sought was, that she should not leave him; that she should not love another better than him; that she should not take from him to give to any one else that affection which was the sole possession which his spirit valued; the only thing that he had ever really sought, or cared for, or loved, or prized. It had been balm to him when his heart was wounded and bleeding; it had been as a beautiful flower upon his pathway when all the rest of life had seemed a desert; it had been his one consolation, his hope, his trust; it had been, in short, his existence, for what is existence without affection?

One day, when he had been thus thinking for many an hour, as he rode through some of the most beautiful parts of the neighbouring country, without taking any notice of tree, or stone, or rock, or river, he returned at a quicker pace to the chateau of Castelneau, and found the Baron de Cajare sitting with Annette alone.

There was a slight flush on Mademoiselle de St. Morin's cheek, and the young officer was looking on the floor, somewhat pale; but the count, though he paused a moment as he entered, and looked from one to the other, made no observation; and seated himself near the window, bearing such an aspect that conversation was renewed with difficulty, and each subject was dropped again as soon as it was started. At length the baron rose, and taking his leave, mounted his horse in the court-yard, and rode away from the chateau. The count watched him from the window with a knitted brow and thoughtful eye; and then turning to Mademoiselle de St. Morin, he said, "Annette, my dear child—"

But almost as he spoke he turned deadly pale; put his hand to his heart and then to his head; grasped ineffectually at the arm of a chair that stood near, and fell forward fainting upon the ground. Servants were speedily called: physicians were procured from Figear and Cahors, but before they arrived, the count, having been stretched on a sofa, had recovered his recollection, and declared himself quite well. It proved however, that he was not so; and he soon found that such was the case when he attempted to rise.

When the physicians came they declared that he was not only seriously ill, but in much danger. It matters not what was the barbarous name they gave to his complaint, their judgment was

correct; and for nearly six weeks he was not permitted to quit the house, nor to take any exercise, but in moving slowly from his bedroom to the saloon. He was forbidden to read or to write; and the hours would have passed sadly and slowly, had it not been for the presence of Annette de St. Morin. She read to him, she sang to him, she played to him, she gave up her whole thoughts to him alone. For many weeks she never set her foot beyond the doors, nor did she see any one but good old Donnine, who was the partner of her toils. Several times the family of Cajare applied for admittance when Annette was with the count, and twice they begged to speak with Mademoiselle de St. Morin if the count could not see them; but Annette distinctly and markedly refused.

The days passed on, as they will pass in sickness or in health, flying like the shadow of a cloud, and leaving nothing behind. Some gradual improvement took place in the health of the count; and one day, after what seemed an effort to command himself, he asked whether any one had lately called at the chateau. Annette replied that there had been no one.

"Not the family of Cajare?" he said.

"Not for ten days," replied Annette, calmly.

"Not the baron?" asked the count, more eagerly.

"Oh no!" replied Annette, with a bright and happy smile.

"Thank Heaven! he has been gone to his regiment this fortnight."

"What mean you, my dear child?" said the count, almost rising from the sofa. "You seem happy that he is gone."

"I am well pleased," she said, "though not exactly happy; for it matters little to me whether he went or stayed, in truth; but still it is pleasanter he should be away."

"What has he done to offend you, Annette?" demanded the count, gazing inquiringly on her face. "He must have done something to make you angry, by the way you speak."

"Oh, no, my dear father!" replied Annette, for by that endearing name she always called him, "he did nothing to make me angry; but he spoke, the last time I saw him, of the joy I would have, some day, in quitting this dull old chateau, and leaving the tiresome society to which I have been so long confined, for all the pomp, and wit, and brightness of the capital."

The count gazed upon her face for two or three minutes without making any reply; but there was a well-pleased smile upon his countenance, which spoke satisfaction and relief.

"He knew you not, my Annette," he replied, at length; "he knew you not;" and without other comment he sunk back upon the cushions of the sofa. But his health improved more rapidly from that day forward.

CHAPTER XIV.

From time to time the Count de Castelnau had urged Annette not to deprive herself altogether of air and exercise on his account, but to go out either on horseback or on foot. She had always avoided doing so, however; and remained steadfast to her post as long as the least danger existed in the case of her friend and pro-

tector. Nor would she quit him till he was again permitted to read and to amuse himself; but when the physicians took off the prohibition from his books, the count insisted that she should take exercise for one or two hours during each day. Nor did he do so without cause; for during the long course of his illness the colour had somewhat faded from Annette's cheek, and the brightness of her eye had been dimmed by anxiety and watching. To see him better, in itself, did her good; and one or two walks or rides through the forest soon brought back the rose to its sweet resting-place. The count was delighted to see her look so much better, and now insisted that she should leave him more frequently than she had hitherto done, promising soon to join her in her rambles. On the fourth day after she had again begun to go out, Mademoiselle de St. Morin proceeded on her walk alone in the cool of the evening. It had been a bright sunshiny day, somewhat fatiguing from the great heat, and the world around seemed full of repose and calm tranquillity. The birds of spring were yet in song, and the rich notes of the blackbird were heard all through the woods, although the nightingale was now silent. The sun, softened down, like a buoyant heart that has just known enough of sorrow to be calm in its cheerfulness, peeped through the bolls of the tall trees, and poured its light underneath the green branches, gilding every inequality of the mossy carpet of the forest with warm streams of yellow light; but the fresh and balmy air of evening was abroad, and a thousand sweet scents were shaken from the wings of the wind. It was an evening to rejoice in, with the high, pure, holy rejoicing which raises the heart from God's works to God himself, and glorifies his name as he has told us it may best be glorified. In the calm, and the stillness, and the freshness, and the brightness of that hour, in its perfume and its melody, there was a call to joy and adoration which the heart of Annette de St. Morin was not formed to resist. She walked on thinking of the beauty of the Almighty works, and of the goodness and greatness of Him who made them: all her sensations were joyful, and all her thoughts were praise.

Thus proceeded she till she came to the same spot where she had sat not very many weeks before, when she had been accosted by the party of travellers, whose strange demeanour seemed to have begun a new epoch in her existence. There were the little cross and fountain, there the bright stream winding on its way, there the bank where she had been seated; and the whole was now filled sweetly with the soft light of the declining sun, the rays of which glittered on the bosom of the water, and seemed to dive for the pebbles at the bottom. The dark wood rose up behind, shrouding, as it were, that sweet spot in its sombre mantle. Annette placed herself where she had been seated before the arrival of the strangers; and the scene, of course, brought its recollections with it. Many a curious question and speculation came also in the train of memory; and she was musing for about twenty minutes, and asking herself who could be the persons whom she had there seen?—what could be the real cause of the agitation which one of the party had displayed?

She was deep in this meditation, when she suddenly heard a sound close to her; and, turning hastily round, she beheld, to

her surprise and consternation, a gaunt she-wolf, followed by two young cubs. It was not the period of the year when those animals generally roam; but sometimes, from heat and want of water, they become very furious even in the midst of summer, especially in Auvergne and some of the midland districts of France. They usually fly, indeed, from any human being if not hard pressed, and if not fled from; but any sudden motion seems to excite their ferocity, and make them turn either to attack others or to defend themselves. Annette knew that such is the case; and had more than once seen a wolf in the forest without meeting any injury or suffering any alarm. At the moment, however, her nerves were somewhat unstrung by long attendance on her sick friend. The beast, too, was close to her, running fast, as if pursued by some one; and giving way to terror, she started up with a quick scream.

The animal instantly sprang at her throat; but luckily caught the collar of the mantle which she wore in its teeth, and tore it off, only slightly grazing the skin. The violence of the attack, however, made the poor girl reel back against the tree, and nearly fall. The wolf was in the very act of springing at her again, and the heart of poor Annette was faint with terror, when there came suddenly the sound of a shot, and the ferocious beast rolled over on its side.

It was not killed; and, though severely wounded, was struggling on its feet again, with a fierce howl, when a gentleman on horse-back galloped quickly up, sprang to the ground, and setting his foot upon the body of the animal, held it firmly down. Mad with pain, it bit the heel of his boot so hard, that he could scarcely shake it off; but, drawing his horse towards him by the rein which was over his arm, while he still held down the wolf with his foot, he took a pistol from the left-hand holster, and discharged it into the furious animal's head. The wolf moved no more; but it was still with difficulty that he withdrew his heel from its jaws, as he turned to aid Mademoiselle de St. Morin, who had now sunk upon the ground, and was supporting herself against the bole of the tree.

Poor Annette, as may well be supposed, was well nigh fainting; and the effect of terror, being very often, as we all know, more severe after the danger has passed away than before, for several minutes she could not speak, even to give one word of thanks, or reply to the many questions which were asked her by the gentleman who had come to her aid.

He treated her with all kindness, and care, and tenderness; brought water in his hand from the little fountain, to sprinkle upon her temples and forehead; and although he gazed upon her with interest, and perhaps with admiration, yet his look was respectful, and such as Annette could have met at any time without casting down her eyes. He assured her again and again that there was no danger; and, taking her hand, which still trembled very much, in order to call her attention, he pointed to the wolf lying dead, saying, "It can hurt nobody now, if it has not hurt you already. Good heaven!" he continued, seeing a drop or two of blood upon the part of her dress which covered her bosom. "I fear it has hurt you! Let me carry you home for assistance! Surely you are Mademoiselle de St. Morin! Let me carry you home!"

He was about to raise her in his arms; but Annette prevented him by laying her hand upon his, and saying, in a low tone, "No, no, I am not hurt; only faint with fear. It is very foolish. I shall be better in a moment."

The gentleman, who had knelt beside her for the purpose of lifting her from the ground, continued in the same posture, gazing upon her with much interest, and endeavouring, to the best of his power, to re-assure her, but still expressing a fear that she was in some degree injured. "No," she said, speaking more freely after the pause of a moment or two; "no, I can assure you, it is nothing. The wolf only tore my mantle at the first spring; but the second would have killed me if it had not been for your arrival. How can I ever thank you?"

"Oh! think not of it, dear lady!" the stranger replied; "it was but a very small service, and one which I would have performed, of course, for the lowest peasant girl in the neighbourhood. How much more gladly, then, for you!"

Annette smiled faintly, and looked up to the face of her deliverer, for the first time, supposing from his words, that, though the voice was unknown to her, he must be some one with whom she was already acquainted; but the face was equally strange, though it was by no means a countenance to be forgotten when once beheld.

"I am ashamed," said Annette, raising herself slowly—"I am ashamed to acknowledge that I do not recollect the person of a gentleman who has rendered me so great a service, though, from what you say, I suppose, of course, I have had the pleasure of meeting you before."

"No, dear lady," her companion replied; "although I am a native of this part of France, circumstances have prevented me from ever forming your acquaintance; but I have heard much and often of Mademoiselle de St. Morin, from those who know and esteem her, and I can but say, that if I could have chosen the person in all France to whom I would most willingly have rendered such a service as this, I should have named yourself."

Such courteous speeches were then so common in France, that the stranger's words sounded in Annette's ears as a mere casual compliment. "You are too kind," she replied; "but I can assure you that my guardian, the Count de Castelneau, who lives not far hence, will be most happy to thank you gratefully for the great service you have rendered me, and will do it much better than I can do it, though I feel the gratitude I owe you as deeply as any one can."

"I fear, madam," replied the stranger, "that it will be impossible for me to visit the Count de Castelneau at the present time; but when you are well enough, I will accompany you so far back towards the chateau as to insure that no farther evil shall befall you."

"If it be not wrong of me to ask it, then," said Annette, "may I inquire to whom I am thus indebted for my life?"

The stranger looked down upon the ground in silence for a moment or two, and then gazing up in her face, with a peculiar smile, he replied, "In answer to your question, dear lady, I might give you a false name, were I so disposed; but I do not think falsehood is ever justified by any circumstances; and I would rather risk of-

sending you, and seeming rude, by giving you no reply, than an untrue one. Yes, if I judge of you rightly, you will forgive me when I tell you it is necessary to my safety that my being in this part of the country should not be known."

"I would forgive you, by all means," replied Annette; "but there is nothing to forgive; though of course I should have been glad, had you thought right, to know the name of him who has delivered me from a great danger: but be it exactly as you please."

The stranger again cast down his eyes for a moment, and then answered, in a somewhat sorrowful tone, "I fear, notwithstanding, that you are a little offended."

"No, indeed," replied Annette; "very far from it. I could of course only wish to know your name, sir, in order to place it, as it were, in the register of memory, coupled with the greatest service, perhaps, that has ever yet been rendered to me by any one."

"Then you shall have it, lady," replied the stranger, "but not now. I will find means to see you before I quit this part of the country, and you will forgive me my silence now when you hear all my reasons for it."

"Indeed," answered Annette, smiling again, "I will not let you diminish my feeling of obligation to you, sir, by persuading me that I have anything to forgive. Whether we do meet again or not, I shall ever recollect the assistance that you have this day rendered me with the deepest gratitude, and think of you as one who has saved my life."

"Though you estimate the service more highly than it deserves," replied the stranger, "it is so pleasant to me that you should thus over-estimate it, that I will not try to make you think otherwise. One thing, perhaps, you have indeed to thank me for, which is the fact of having conquered a momentary fear of hurting you in the attempt to save you. As I was riding through the by-paths of the wood before I saw you, the wolf and its cubs ran on for some way before me. At the turn, up there by those holly bushes, I lost sight of the animal for an instant; but the next moment, hearing you scream, and galloping on, I beheld it flying at your throat. As soon as I heard you cry I had taken a pistol from the holster; but for a moment I hesitated to fire, for fear of missing the ferocious beast and hitting you. I soon saw, however, that there was no time to be lost. I rarely miss my mark, and did not in this instance, as you know; though had I been less apprehensive I might have killed the wolf at the first shot, and then it would not have bit my heel in the way that it has done."

Annette started with a look of fear and anxiety, and saw that the moss round the spot where the stranger's foot rested was stained for some way with blood.

"Oh! come to the chateau," she said, eagerly. "Come to the chateau and have the wound attended to. I fear, indeed, I fear that you are a good deal hurt."

Her countenance expressed her apprehensions even more than her words; but the stranger only laughed, assured her that the bite was a mere nothing, and would be well in a few days.

"I will accompany you," he said, "till we come within sight of the chateau, dear lady. I see you are now well enough to walk home;

and I can only say that I am most sincerely grateful to some indescribable expectation of I knew not what, which led me through this part of the forest to-day. To tell the truth," he added, after a brief pause, accompanying his words with a gay frank smile, "there might have been some expectation—some hope, perhaps, of seeing Mademoiselle de St. Morin, though certainly there was neither expectation nor hope of even conversing with her, far less of rendering her any aid."

There was something in the tone and the manner, in a slight touch of embarrassment which mingled with the frankness, in a degree of wavering in the voice and sparkling in the eye, that showed the words to be not a mere thing of course. The colour rose slightly in Annette's cheek at the compliment which the stranger's speech implied; though there is many a woman who would have sought to make that compliment greater and more direct, by pretending not to understand it, Annette was not of those. She shrunk from it as some plants do from even the most delicate touch; and she only replied, "I think it would be much better for you to accompany me to the chateau, and have the wound dressed. You may perfectly trust to my kind guardian Monsieur de Castelneau; for he would betray no man, and far less one who has saved my life."

The stranger, however, still resisted her entreaty, but walked on by Annette's side leading his horse by the bridle, and giving her assistance at every little rough spot of the forest road, though he did not absolutely offer her his arm to support her still agitated and wavering steps.

Annette did not contrive such forbearance into any neglect of what was due to her as a lady, or into any want of kind consideration for her yet scarcely allayed terror. The stranger's manner was all courteous, and his words and tone so kind, so tender—if we may use that word in its proper senses of gentle and compassionate—that Mademoiselle de St. Morin felt there was nothing wanting in his demeanour to make her at ease by his side. There was, indeed, an expression of interest and admiration in his eyes when he looked upon her, which might have agitated her had his whole manner not been even on the colder side of respect. She would have taken his arm without the slightest hesitation, had he offered it, but she did not think worse of him for refraining.

Thus they walked on somewhat slowly towards the chateau, sometimes speaking, but sometimes silent for several minutes. At length the stranger said, rather abruptly, after an interval of thought, "Might it not be better, Mademoiselle de St. Morin, not to mention at all to Monsieur de Castelneau what has occurred to-day?"

Annette started, and looked full in her companion's face; for she had imagined—why and wherefore it would be difficult to tell, perhaps from his countenance, which was noble and open, perhaps from his having rendered her an important service, and thus won gratitude on his side, but she had imagined and convinced herself that he was all that is frank and sincere. "Oh no!" she replied, eagerly, after that inquiring look; "I always tell him everything that occurs. I should be unworthy of the kindness he has ever shown me, if I could conceal anything from him."

"You mistake me, I think," said the stranger with a smile. "I only meant, till the count is better. I have heard that he is very ill; and one of the physicians who is attending him, and who also frequently sees a sick relation of my own, informed me that anything which agitates Monsieur de Castelneau is likely to cause a relapse in his present state. You know best, however. I only feared that to hear of the great danger of one whom he loves—whom he must love—so dearly, might perhaps retard his recovery. But no one can judge better than you."

The cloud cleared away from Annette's face in a moment; she felt that she had done her companion wrong in her own thoughts, and with the noble candour of her nature she hastened to acknowledge it.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "I did mistake you, and I am sorry for so doing; for I am sure you think as I do, that to a person who has always loved, and been kind, and generous, and good to us, as Monsieur de Castelneau has been to me, perfect sincerity and truth are always the best: are, in fact, a duty."

"Indeed I do, Mademoiselle de St. Morin," replied the stranger, warmly. "There may be many people who admire you alone for your beauty, but it is for such feelings as those which you have just expressed that I can most admire you. It is for actions founded on such feelings that I have learnt to esteem you from my early youth."

Mademoiselle de St. Morin coloured at the stranger's words, although they were very pleasant to her ear; not so much because they were in praise of herself, as because they showed that her first impression of her companion's character was not incorrect. He marked the blood rising in her cheek, however, and hastened to give another turn to what he was saying.

"I think," he continued, "that we may very easily lay down a rule for ourselves in setting out in life, by which we may satisfy our own heart, and yet guard against the dangers of over-confidence. In dealing with others, our maxim should be, perfect candour to all those who love us, who are frank with us, and whom we can esteem; reserve towards those whom we have no reason to trust, or any reason to distrust: but truth to all."

"Oh! I agree with you heartily," cried Annette, gazing up in the fine countenance of him who spoke those words, with one of those winning looks of pleasure that from such eyes as hers are hard to be resisted; and from that moment there were many of the cold and iron barriers which society raises up between strangers cast down for her and her companion.

They walked slowly on then, speaking together as if they had been old friends. Both felt happy in the communication thus established between them: both felt pleased and interested in discovering new things in each other's hearts, which harmonized well with the thoughts and feelings of both. They walked slowly, I have said; but yet the time seemed very short ere, through the opening of the wood, they saw some of the detached towers of the chateau; and the stranger paused to take leave of Mademoiselle de St. Morin.

"I believe," he said, "that I must here bid you adieu. I need

boldly add that I regret it much, for I have certainly passed an hour of very great happiness by your side."

Annette cast her eyes down; she felt that she could have said the same, and on any former occasion the natural straightforward candour of her heart would have made her do so at once. But now, for some reason, or rather I should say from some feeling which she could not account for, her lips would not utter such a confession, and she remained silent while her companion went on.

"And now, perhaps," he continued, "I am leaving you never to see you again. However, I trust that you will believe me, when I say that I shall ever recollect you, and the short, the too short time I have spent with you, as amongst the very brightest memories of a life which has had but too few of such sweet things to remember. It is very hard," he added, with a sigh, "that if in the midst of the great solitude of existence we do find some being with whom we could joyfully spend many a long day, we are almost always sure to have but a short glimpse of them, and never to see them again. I am sure, Mademoiselle de St. Morin," he went on, seeing the colour flutter in her cheek, "I am sure that you do not misunderstand me, nor think for one moment that I mean anything but what is equally respectful and true towards you, or anything, indeed, that even this very short acquaintance does not fully justify me in saying."

"Oh! no, no," replied the young lady, eagerly; "it was not that. I only wish to tell you, and did not very well know how to say it, that I am very, very grateful for your kindness to me; equally grateful to you, indeed, for saving my life, and for your kind and considerate conduct since; and I do hope and trust," she continued, growing bolder as she spoke, "that, so far from never meeting again, we may meet soon, and meet often. I may add, that it will be your fault if we do not; for I can venture to assure you, that the gates of the chateau of Castelneau will ever be open to you, and that I myself, and my more than father, will be very, very glad to show you how grateful we are for what you have done in my defence."

The stranger looked much gratified; but he replied, "Do not, dear lady, do not tempt me too much; and, should I be prevented from taking advantage of so kind an invitation, do not, pray do not say that it is my fault; but believe, on the contrary, that it is my misfortune; and now, though every minute may be sweet, I will not detain you longer, but pray Heaven to bless and keep you in its special care."

Thus saying, he took her hand respectfully and pressed his lips upon it; and she, wishing him good-bye, proceeded on her way towards the chateau, bearing with her feelings which she had never experienced before, but not such as to prevent her from acknowledging boldly to her own heart that she should be very sorry, indeed, if this first meeting with the stranger should be the last.

From this fact it will clearly be perceived by the learned reader—learned in that most difficult, obscure, and abstruse book, the human heart—that Annette was not in the least degree in love with her companion of the last half hour; for, had she been so, she would never have acknowledged anything to her own heart at all,

but would have courted, on the contrary, that sort of mental blindness to all that was passing in her own bosom, of which the bandage over Cupid's eyes is but a just emblem. However that may be, in the short space between the wood and the chateau, she asked herself several times whether it would, or would not, be better to tell the count, in his present state of health, what had occurred to her. It were scarcely fair, to ask whether—hidden from her own eyes, in the deep recesses of the heart—any shy spirit put off upon her, like a coiner, passing false money for real, one sort of motives for another. Suffice it that her heart was too upright by nature, to suffer one wish for concealment to affect her conduct; and before she had reached the gates of the chateau, she had made up her mind to tell the count the whole, but to do so carefully and cautiously for fear of alarming him.

CHAPTER XV.

ANNETTE entered the saloon, where the Count de Castelneau was stretched upon the sofa reading, with the mantle which the wolf had torn from her neck cast over her arm. The count laid down the book, and raised himself, to speak with her; but the moment that he did so, the penetrating eyes of strong affection discovered at once that something had gone wrong. "Come hither, my Annette," he cried. "What is the matter? You are not well; your cheek is very pale, my dear child; your mantle torn, and blood upon your bosom."

"Oh! it is nothing," replied Annette, smiling, and seeing all her plans of communicating her intelligence with caution overthrown in a moment. "It is nothing, I can assure you, my dear father. A little accident which I met with in the wood! It might have been more serious; but, as it is, no harm has happened."

"But speak, Annette, speak!" said the count. "What is it? It must have been something serious, indeed, to leave your cheek so pale."

"Oh! no, indeed," she answered. "I was frightened, but not hurt. The truth is, I met a wolf in the wood——"

"And he flew at you!" cried the count, eagerly. "He attacked you! Is it not so, Annette? How did you escape, my girl?"

"Nay, do not be alarmed," said Annette; "you see I am quite safe. It was an old wolf followed by two young ones, and she did, as you think, fly at my throat: she caught my mantle in her teeth and tore it off, scratching me—not with her teeth, I think—but with the clasps of the mantle. She was springing at me again, however, when a gentleman rode up, and shot her with a pistol which he took from his holsters. The animal was not quite dead, and bit his heel very severely; but I did not see much of what happened then, for I was nearly fainting."

"The Baron de Cajare?" said the count. "Was it the Baron de Cajare?"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Annette; "quite a different person."

"Who then, who then?" asked Monsieur de Castelneau, quickly.

"Nay, that I cannot tell," replied his adopted child; "for, al-

though he was as courteous as he could be in all other things, he would not give his name; and he told me very plainly, when he had escorted me nearly to the chateau, that it was probable I should never see him again."

"Indeed!" said the count. "Some stranger travelling through the country, perhaps."

"No, certainly he was not that," answered Annette. "He knew who I was, though I did not know him. He had heard, too, that you were ill, and seemed well acquainted with all about you; but yet I could not get him to come on to the chateau, though the wolf had bit him in the heel severely, I should imagine, from the blood I saw. He told me, however, that he had particular reasons for not making himself known."

The count turned somewhat pale, and inquired, "What age was he?"

"That I can hardly tell," replied Annette, "but——"

"Was he old or young?" demanded the count, interrupting her.

"Oh, young!" exclaimed Annette, "young, certainly! Perhaps five or six-and-twenty, but not more."

The count seemed relieved, and answered, "It is a pity your gallant deliverer would not come in, my Annette: you might have told him that he could trust me in safety."

"I did so," answered Annette, "but I could not prevail. He was very obdurate indeed, I can assure you."

"He must be obdurate, indeed, my dear child, with whom *you* could not prevail," said the count; "but go, my Annette, wash away the blood from your neck, and then come back. You shall instantly write a note for me to the Baron de Nogent. He is the *louvettier** of the canton; and, though it be not the proper season for hunting them, we must not suffer them to roam about in this way, at any time of the year."

The note was accordingly written in the course of that evening, and was sent over to Castel-Nogent by a man on horseback, who returned in about two hours. He brought no note in answer to that of the count, but merely a message. The Baron de Nogent, he said, was ill in bed; but he had told one of his servants to reply, that, having heard that one or two wolves had been seen in the neighbourhood, he had already ordered the dogs and men, which he was obliged to maintain for that purpose, to clear the country of the savage beasts, and the hunters were even then in the woods, putting these commands into execution.

"Ill, is he?" demanded the count.

"Yea, my lord," answered the servant; "he has been very ill, his people said, for more than three weeks."

"I grieve that I cannot go over to see him," said Monsieur de Castelneau, turning to Annette; "he is one of the few men whom I can respect and esteem. Could you not ride over to-morrow, my Annette, and visit him for me? He is so solitary at all times,

* Many noblemen were formerly invested with this office of *louvettier*, or titular hunter of the wolves in their district; nor is it yet altogether abolished, although the wolves in France have greatly decreased in numbers since that time.

that I cannot but think in sickness it would be a comfort to him to see you."

"Oh! I will go willingly," replied Annette. "You know how I love and reverence him. I wish from my heart he would let us do anything to make his solitary hours more cheerful than they are."

Before the sun had risen into the meridian on the following morning, Annette mounted a pennet, which had been bought and trained for her own riding; and followed, as was then customary, by two or three servants, she took the road towards Fontenay, and in little more than an hour had reached Castel Nogent. After some delay, the baron admitted her to his sick chamber, and thanked her for her visit with kindness and sincerity. She found him very much worn; but he assured her that he was much better than he had been, and would soon be well. For more than an hour Annette sat by him striving to cheer and amuse him; and so successful did she find herself, that she promised to return in a day or two, if her guardian continued to improve in health. The baron caught eagerly at her offer, and reminded her of it when she went away; and Annette, repeating that she would not forget, left him with a heart satisfied and gay at having done an act of kindness, and seeing that it was not only appreciated, but successful to the fullest extent she could desire.

She was riding quickly through the woods, with the beauty of the scene, the fineness of the day, and the exhilarating motion of her horse all adding to the glad sensations of her own heart, when suddenly, at one of the cross roads of the forest, she was met by a gentleman on horseback, who for an instant drew in his rein as if with surprise and hesitation; but the moment after rode up to her with a low inclination of the head, and turned his horse upon the same path which she was pursuing.

The reader has already divined what Annette discovered at first sight—that the stranger who now joined her was the person who had saved her from the wolf. He was differently dressed, however; and was now clothed in a rich hunting suit, which became him well. It was impossible not to own that in person and in features he was a very handsome man; but that was little in Annette's estimation, when compared with the high and noble expression of his countenance, which would certainly prove nature to be a sad deceiver, she thought, if his heart were not generous and kind.

Mademoiselle de St. Morin received him with a glad and open smile, held out her hand frankly towards him, and said at once, "Oh! I am so glad to see you again."

The stranger pressed the hand which she gave in his own; and his sparkling eyes replied in language not to be mistaken, that if she was glad to see him, he was no less so to see her. There was, however, in the young lady's look a gay and playful expression—a meaning, perhaps, it might be called—which surprised her companion; and while the grooms dropped farther behind, and she rode on with him side by side, she led the conversation cheerfully and brightly, as if she had known him for many years.

"I am happy," he said at length, "most happy, to see you so well, and that your fright has not hurt your health or spirits."

"You think my spirits high, perhaps," answered Annette, "be-

"I use I am more gay and familiar with you than I was when last we met. There is a reason for it, however. Do you know what that reason is?"

"No, indeed," he replied, "I cannot even divine it. Nay more, I have learnt from many an old fiction and tale of my childhood, that where anything which makes us very happy is dark and mysterious we should never pry into the secret, lest we dispel the charm."

"But I will tell you the secret," replied Annette; "for the magic is all very simple, I can assure you. The secret then is, that I now know who you are; and believe me that discovery makes a very great difference; for although I must ever have been grateful, had you been who you might, there are some whom it is a pleasure to be grateful to: some a pain."

"Are you sure you are right, dear lady?" said the stranger.

"I am sure," she replied, "quite sure, though no one has betrayed you."

"How then is it possible you can know?" he demanded; "for I am certain that you never saw me until two days ago."

"Nay, I discovered it very easily," she answered; "by studying the face of a father after I had seen that of a son. Not that the features are alike, but the expression. You will understand better what I mean, when I tell you that I have just been to Castel Nogent, and sat with the baron for near an hour."

"Then all I have to say, dear lady," replied the other, "is, that I must now, not only beg you to be cautious, but most particularly request that you will confine the discovery you have made to your own breast alone. I think I may ask this of you, without asking anything wrong; and I believe you will grant it, when you know that I am now both absent from my regiment without leave, and contrary to the express commands of the officer next in rank above myself; I mean the Baron de Cajarc. I received news that my father was at the point of death; and as my presence was not wanted with the regiment, I merely announced to Monsieur de Cajarc that it was my intention to visit this part of the country, stating my motives at full. He was himself wasting his time in Paris, at the distance of two days' journey from the corps; but he thought fit to send a messenger, prohibiting my coming into this part of France. I instantly lodged my appeal with his superior and mine; but had I waited for a reply, my father might have been dead before I came. I therefore had to choose my course, and at once decided on coming hither immediately. My companions are all my friends, and they give me good intelligence; but I must return to-morrow or the day after, lest this gentleman rejoin the regiment and find that I am absent."

"Oh! for pity's sake rejoin it at once," exclaimed Annette. "I tremble to think what might be the consequences, if your absence were discovered. I cannot help supposing that Monsieur de Cajarc is a somewhat heartless person, who would show but little compassion or consideration of any kind."

"In this instance," replied her companion, "he has certainly shown very little consideration: and I know not why he has acquired for himself in the service the reputation of a very artful,

and a very remorseless man. I must own myself, however," he added, frankly, "that I have never personally seen him say or do anything that would give rise to such an opinion. His demeanour, as far as I have seen it, has always been that of a finished gentleman and a man of refined taste."

Mademoiselle de St. Morin looked down thoughtfully, but for some time made no reply. At length, however, she answered, "I know too little of him to judge; but I should rather think that, in the ordinary course of life, people display what they will be on great occasions by small traits, and you may depend upon it, that it is by these his fellow officers have judged him."

"It may be so," replied her companion; "and, indeed, the only story that I ever heard of his doing anything to win himself such a reputation, referred to his having won a large sum from a young man at play. The loser had, indeed, lost all, and more than all, for he was forced to tell Cajare that he had not wherewithal to pay him; upon which the baron coolly took his sword and broke it across his knee, saying, what was, perhaps, true, but very cruel: that he who played for sums he could not pay, was unworthy to wear the weapon of a man of honour. The unhappy man threw open the window which was just above the course of the Rhone, and cast himself headlong out. Cajare sat still at the table, and called for more cards. So goes the story in the regiment; but I was not with it at the time, being then a lieutenant in the regiment of Picardy."

Annette gave a shudder as she listened, but made no reply, and her companion soon turned the conversation to other things. During the course of their ride, she found the same highly-finished taste, the same knowledge of men, of countries, and of arts, which had given a charm to the conversation of the Baron de Cajare; but there was something superadded now, something that, like the sunshine to a beautiful landscape, afforded the crowning grace to all the rest, brightened everything it shone upon, and called forth the beauties of the whole. It was, that the heart spoke as well as the head; it was, that there was feeling, as well as thought, in everything. Frankness and openness too, candour and bright sincerity, were in every word that he spoke; and though it was evident that he considered far less what was likely to please than Monsieur de Cajare, he did please without the effort, and won without the calculation. It was a bright hour for Annette while she rode onward with him towards the chateau. At length, however, he drew in his rein, saying, with a deep sigh, "And now that I must leave you, forgive me if I repeat, in thus parting from you, certainly for a long time, and perhaps for ever, that I shall recollect you long and well; far too long ever to enjoy again the society with which I am going to mingle. I shall see nothing like you there; and yet I cannot find in my heart to regret that I have thus met you, even though I be destined thus to leave you. I mean no compliment, no exaggeration, but simple truth."

Annette blushed deeply; but yet she found courage to raise her eyes to his, saying, in a tone gently reproachful, "Oh! Monsieur Nogent, how can I answer you? All I will say, then, is, pray, go back to your regiment, and believe me, that I will see your father

constantly, and show him every care and tendance in my power, as much out of gratitude to you as out of affectionate regard for him." She held out her hand to him once more; he pressed his lips upon it, and then turning his horse, rode away.

Annette proceeded slowly to the chateau; but as she guided her horse through the gates, she looked back towards the hills and woodlands stretching in the direction of Fons. There was one spot where the shoulder of the nearest acclivity protruded bare through the wood, and commanded a view of the chateau and the ground round about it. On the summit of the hill, at the distance of about three quarters of a mile, Annette de St. Morin saw a single horseman. He was perfectly motionless, and was evidently gazing upon the path she had taken. It was not, of course, by features or by dress that Annette could distinguish at that distance who it was, but there was something within told her at once the name of him who was there watching for the last look.

CHAPTER XVI.

As Annette passed through the old hall, and was taking her way up the stairs which led to the saloon, she paused from time to time to reflect. Her thoughts were in confusion; the usual calm tranquillity did not reign in her bosom; her heart beat, and her mind would not fix upon any certain point. She was alarmed at her own sensations, and asked herself the cause of them.

One of the causes—for in this instance, as in all others, there were many causes combining to produce one effect—she soon discovered; but it was not the chief cause. She had tacitly promised not to reveal the fact, which she had discovered accidentally, of the presence of the young Baron de Nogent in that part of the country; and she fancied that it was the necessity of concealing anything from one to whom she had hitherto been all candour, that thus agitated and bewildered her. She felt, however, that she had no right to sport with the fate of another; and though she was sure that the secret, with the Count de Castelneau, would be as safe as with herself, yet, as he whom that secret chiefly affected had besought her to tell no one, she resolved to obey the injunction to the letter.

There was no difficulty in so doing, for her guardian had retired to take some repose during the heat of noon; which had lately become customary with him, and from which habit he had derived great benefit. When he returned to the saloon, he confined his questions entirely to the state of the good old nobleman whom Annette had visited, approved highly of her promise to see him again, and expressed a wish that she would go to Castel Nogent on the ensuing day.

Annette hesitated, however, and then replied, that she would rather postpone her visit till the morning after. The count said, "Let it be so;" but he gave her an inquiring glance, asking himself why she, who was ever ready to fly to aid and comfort those who needed either assistance or consolation, should delay in the present instance the execution of her task of kindness. Annette saw him

look at her gravely, and her colour rose into her cheek, for the motive of her conduct was not easily to be explained even to herself.

The fact is, she wished Ernest de Nogent to be gone back to his regiment before she renewed her visit to his father, and she feared that such might not be the case if she went to Castel Nogent the next day. Was his society disagreeable to her, then? Oh, no! but the agitation which she felt—ay, and his evident admiration; and, even more than all, the new strange pleasure which his conversation had afforded, frightened her young and inexperienced heart, and made her wish for thought, long intense thought, ere she beheld him again. Timidity ever flies from that which it loves; and it is no proof at all that the society of the young Baron de Nogent was not more pleasing to Mademoiselle St. Morin than any other which she had met with in life, that she was unwilling to return to Castel Nogent till she was perfectly sure that he had left it. She coloured a little then, more from the inexplicability of her own feelings than aught else; but the count took no notice, except in his own heart, and Annette's journey was accordingly put off for a day.

In the mean time, what were the comments with her own spirit? What were the questions that she asked her own heart? What were the replies that her own heart made?

Alack, and a well-a-day, reader, that we should confess it! But Annette was a woman; and with all a woman's feelings she retired to her chamber that night, thinking that she had the most anxious purpose of inquiring into her own sensations; of asking herself, in short, a thousand questions which nobody but herself could answer. Yet when she had entered her own chamber, and closed the door, and leaned her head upon her hand, and began the inquiry, she stopped at the very threshold of the secret chamber, and would go on no farther. She persuaded herself that there was nothing to inquire into, that she had been frightened about nothing, that it was all extremely natural and very right for her to like the conversation, and be pleased with the society, of a graceful and accomplished man who had saved her life; and though, perhaps, there were doubts at the very bottom of her heart of all this reasoning being correct, yet she suffered it to prevent her from inquiring farther, and let it convince her will if it did not convince her judgment. Have we not often seen a child stand on a summer day at the margin of the sunny sea, longing to bathe its limbs in the refreshing wave? Have we not seen it cast off its garments and dip in the timid foot, draw back, hurry on its clothing again, and run away, as if in fear of those bright but untried waters? Thus was it with Mademoiselle de St. Morin; the ocean of love was before her, and she trembled to venture in.

Yet, when, on the day appointed, she once more mounted her jennet to ride over to Castel Nogent, a soft sort of melancholy hung upon her; perhaps a feeling of regret, to think that Ernest de Nogent was not there; that she could not see him again, to use his own words, "certainly for a long time, perhaps for ever." She rode more slowly and thoughtfully than she had formerly done; she gazed round at the spot where she had parted from him; she stopped her horse at the little fountain and let him drip in the

ream, and then, with a sigh, she shook the rein and went on upon her way.

When she arrived at Castel Nogent, she paused at the usual entrance, which, let it be remarked, was a side-door, and not the great gates; and on ringing the bell, was immediately admitted by an old and faithful servant of the family.

"Oh, madam!" he said, "the baron is very much better; I think your visit did him a great deal of good. If you will come into the library for a moment, he will be down stairs."

Annette followed to the library, which she found untenanted, except by the sunshine, that poured in at the window through the branches of a thin tree opposite, and, dancing upon the floor as the wind waved the boughs, gave an air of cheerful life to the apartment. It was a fine old room, well stored with curious volumes, and with old lances and other weapons of a remote period, forming trophies between the book-cases; while here and there a casque, a corselet, or suit of complete armour, belonging to some of the ancestors of the baron, long dead, was seen on any vacant space upon the walls. The armour, it is true, was somewhat rusty, the books covered with the dust of time; manifold notes danced in the beams of light; and everything showed that the servants in Castel Nogent were too few in number to keep the house in that exact order which leaves the hand of Time nearly powerless.

There was an air of dryness, however, and cheerful antiquity about the library, which was pleasant to the eye; and, as it was a place well suited to contemplation, Annette's first act was to fall into a reverie, still standing in the middle of the floor, with one hand resting on the tall back of the chair which the old servant had placed for her, the other holding her riding-whip dropping gracefully by her side, and her whole form and face presenting such an exquisite picture of Beauty in meditation, that one might well have wished to be a painter, in order to draw her portrait as she there stood.

Her fancies must have been sweet, though they might have a tinge of melancholy in them, for the brow was as open as a bright summer's morning. But the mind must have been very intently occupied with some object, for she remained during several minutes exactly in one position, without the slightest movement of any kind, whatsoever.

On the left-hand side, close by the tall window, and some eight or ten feet from the spot where she had placed herself, was a small door leading into various apartments of the old chateau; and at length, if her eyes had not been fixed so steadily upon the floor, she might have seen that door move slowly on its hinges. She did not see it, however, and the first thing that roused her was a shadow coming across the sunshine which found its way through the window.

Annette started and raised her eyes, a little confused, perhaps, at being found in so deep a fit of meditation; but all the blood rushed up into her face in a moment, when she beheld Earnest de Nogent himself, standing before her.

"Ah, Monsieur de Nogent!" she said, "what has kept you here? Indeed, I am very much afraid that it may be dangerous to yourself."

Ernest advanced, and took her hand with a smile half gay, half melancholy.

"Perhaps it may be dangerous," he said, shaking his head. "It may be dangerous to me in more respects than you mean; but you must not ask me what has kept me here."

"Nay," she answered gaily, trying to laugh away the agitation which she certainly did feel, but withdrawing her hand from his, "you are very mysterious; and I will not attempt to discover mysteries with which I have nothing to do."

"With this mystery, I am afraid," he replied, in a low and thoughtful voice; "with this mystery I am afraid you have not a little to do."

Annette turned pale. "Indeed!" she said, with her heart beating violently. "I should be very sorry to suppose that were the case, for I do think it very imprudent for you to stay."

"Not so imprudent as you imagine; at least, in the sense that you mean," replied Ernest; "but, in another sense, even more imprudent than you can believe."

Annette was very much agitated, for his manner spoke more, perhaps, than his words; but do not let it be thought that she was hypocritical, if she tried to avoid a subject which produced so much emotion, and endeavoured to turn the conversation back to the danger which her companion ran in remaining there.

"But you told me," she said, "you yourself acknowledged to me, that there was a very, very great risk in your coming hither at all, and still more in your staying, when every hour may produce a discovery of your absence."

"I have received letters from Paris since we last met," he said; "but the truth is, Mademoiselle de St. Morin, I am, I fear, very foolish, and I have to make two acknowledgments, each of which may appear very strange to you, and each of which may perhaps give you offence. I could not make up my mind to go without seeing you again. That is my first acknowledgment: the next is, that I am sometimes tempted to wish with my whole heart that I had never beheld you at all."

He had taken Annette's hand while he spoke, and he could not be insensible how it trembled in his own. The varying colour in her cheek, the downcast look of her bright eye, the quick and agitated breathing, might all encourage him to proceed; but, though such signs were not without their happy auguries, Ernest was both unwilling to agitate her too much, and too doubtful of success to press his suit vehemently. Before he had well concluded his sentence, Annette had sunk slowly down into the chair beside her, and placed her left hand over her eyes.

"I agitate you," he continued, suffering her hand to be gently withdrawn from his. "Nay, nay, do not be so much moved. Listen to me, Mademoiselle de St. Morin; listen to me calmly. It is I who have cause to be agitated and apprehensive: but, hark!" he continued, pausing abruptly. "Hark! there is the sound of wheels. What may this mean? It never happens but thus; and when we have but one precious moment on which depend our fate and happiness for ever, we are prevented from using it by some impertinent trifle."

Annette looked up, pushed back the curls from her face, over which they had fallen in the agitation of the moment; wiped away something like a tear from her eyes, and then held out her hand again to Ernest de Nogent with a smile, which at that moment he would not have exchanged for an empire.

It might be a long task, reader, to explain all the little peculiarities in thought and feeling which made her act so differently from any other woman; and even when it was done, you might not perhaps understand the whole clearly, if you have not comprehended the whole clearly already, from the account that has been laid before you of her education and her natural disposition. She could hardly recover herself, however, and remove the traces of agitation from her countenance, ere the door of the library opened, and the old servant entered, with a face somewhat pale, announcing—the Baron de Cajare!

Ernest de Nogent drew himself up to his full height; and his left hand, by an impulse that he could not resist, fell upon the scabbard of his sword, as if to bring the hilt round towards the right. Annette had just time to give him one imploring look, saying, in a low voice, "For Heaven's sake, for your father's sake, for my sake, recollect yourself!" when the Baron de Cajare entered the room, and advanced with his usual calm and graceful demeanour towards the spot where Mademoiselle de St. Morin was seated. His lip was curled with the slightest possible sarcastic smile; but there was no frown upon his brow, and he bowed with the utmost politeness to Annette, saying, "This is an unexpected pleasure, mademoiselle; I trust that you have continued in health and happiness, notwithstanding your close attendance upon Monsieur de Castelneau."

Annette bowed her head; and, hoping from his manner that the errand of the Baron de Cajare was not such as she and Ernest himself believed it to be, she replied in polite terms, and at greater length than she otherwise would have done, stating that she herself was well, and that the Count de Castelneau was daily improving in health.

The baron listened to every word with the most courteous attention, and, ere she had concluded, the old Baron de Nogent himself was in the room. That gentleman instantly fixed his eyes with a frown upon the Baron de Cajare, though he grasped Annette's hand, as if to show her that he did not overlook her, and thanked her for her coming.

"To what cause, Monsieur de Cajare," he said, "am I to attribute the honour of this unexpected and unusual visit?"

"I hope you are better, my dear sir," replied the baron; "but I must not take to myself more credit than is my due. My visit is not to yourself, as my very slight acquaintance with you, Monsieur de Nogent, would not justify such intrusion; but it is to this good gentleman, your son, a captain in my regiment of horse, with whom I wish to speak a word or two upon business, which we will not discuss in the presence of a lady."

"Mademoiselle de St. Morin will excuse me, sir," said the baron, "if I beg to know at once what is your purpose towards my son."

"I must beg an answer to a similar question, too," added Ernest; "as I take it for granted, after our late correspondence, that you did

"not come here without an object of some importance, and I must choose my own measures accordingly."

"You will of course take no measures but those that are right and proper," replied the baron; "but as you say that *Mademoiselle de St. Morin* will excuse us all, and as I am in some haste, I will merely beg leave to state that I am under the disagreeable necessity of arresting my young friend here for disobedience of orders, and of sending him to trial for that offence."

"In short, sir," replied the old baron, "you sought to keep him from his father's sick bed, and now you would seek to break that father's heart."

"A somewhat hard construction of a simple act of duty," replied Monsieur de Cajare; "nevertheless, my dear sir, it must be accomplished," and he moved towards the window.

"Is it possible that your nature can be so hard and unfeeling?" said Annette. "Pray, pray, Monsieur de Cajare, have some consideration for the circumstances of the case."

"Alas, my dear young lady!" replied the baron, "war is a school that makes us very hard-hearted, I am afraid; but, notwithstanding, I must call up the guard. Do not be frightened at their mustaches, dear lady," he added, with a sarcastic smile; "the Parisian ladies tell me they are very harmless people."

While speaking, he had approached the window, and now putting out his head, he called "Come up! come up!"

Something that he saw below seemed to excite his surprise, however, for he still continued to look out, exclaiming, "Diantre! what is the meaning of this? Come up, I say!"

In the meanwhile the baron and his son and Annette de St. Morin gazed for a moment or two, with the silence of deep grief, in each other's faces, but no time was allowed them to speak; for even while Monsieur de Cajare was calling from the window, and ordering the guard a second time, with no very measured language, to come up, a gentleman dressed in black, and holding a paper in his hand, entered the room with a quiet and noiseless step, and advanced gravely but quickly, without saluting anybody.

The baron and his son stared at this new intruder with evident surprise; but Annette instantly recognised the gentleman whom she had seen with two ladies near the fountain in the wood, and, why she knew not, but his presence seemed a relief to her. He took not the slightest notice of her on the present occasion, however; and, passing the party in the middle of the room, proceeded to the window from which the Baron de Cajare was reiterating his order to come up, adding, in a fierce tone and with a somewhat ungentlemanlike interjection, "Why do you not obey?"

So quiet was the step of the stranger who had so suddenly entered the room, that the baron was perfectly unconscious of his presence till he felt a heavy hand upon his shoulder, and heard the words, which were then somewhat fearful in France, "*De par le Roi!*"

Monsieur de Cajare instantly turned round, and when he beheld the person who stood beside him, turned deadly pale.

"Monsieur le Baron de Cajare," said the stranger, "in virtue of this *lettre de cachet*, I arrest you in the name of the king, and enjoin you to go with me."

"Where do you intend to take me, Monsieur Morin?" said the baron at once, without the slightest sign of resistance.

"I intend to send you to the Bastille, sir," replied Pierre Morin. "I have some other business yet to do in this part of the world, so that I cannot have the honour of accompanying you to Paris. Everything is prepared for your comfortable journey; your own carriage is below, or I am much mistaken; but you made a little mistake just now, and took my archers for your own soldiers. May I ask you to walk down, sir, with all convenient speed?"

The Baron de Cajare looked at Annette and then at Ernest de Nogent, and for an instant an expression like that of a fiend came over his countenance. It was gone almost as soon as it appeared; the angry voice in which he called from the window, was laid aside likewise, and not the slightest change of tone from that which he used in ordinary conversation was to be distinguished, as he answered Pierre Morin, "Well, Monsieur Morin, of course I obey the king's commands; but I beg leave to say, my young friend here, Monsieur de Nogent, is under my arrest. I must give him into the care of my guard before——"

"You must do nothing before obeying the king's commands, sir," replied Pierre Morin: "besides, you need put yourself into no trouble regarding your soldiers, for I took the liberty of discharging them from attendance upon you. You must recollect, Monsieur le Baron, prisoners have no authority. As to Monsieur de Nogent, sir, I have also the king's orders——"

"To arrest him?" exclaimed the Baron de Cajare.

"I shall notify his majesty's commands affecting him to himself, sir," replied Pierre Morin, in a stern tone, "and not to you. Allow me to say, we are wasting time. You caused me to hurry down here, sir, from the capital, when, if you had attended to the hint sent to you by the Duke de Choiseul, you would have saved me much trouble, and might, perhaps, have saved yourself from the Bastille; but vengeance, sir, has no forethought, and his majesty has been made to understand the motives upon which you acted."

"He might at least have sent a gentleman to arrest me," said the Baron de Cajare, with a curling lip.

Pierre Morin seemed not in the slightest degree offended, merely replying, "Sir, I obey his majesty's commands, and he expects you to do the same, be they notified to you by whom they may. But, at the same time, if it be any gratification to you to know that you are treated in the same manner as other persons, let me call to your mind, that Pierre Morin, chief officer of the king's lieutenant-general of police, has arrested gentlemen whose ancestors were noble five centuries before your great-grandfather quitted the little bureau in the Rue Quinquampoix."

The colour came warm into the cheek of Baron de Cajare, as Pierre Morin, in the quietest possible tone, rebuked his insolent pride. The chief agent of the police of Paris, however, was not to be trifled with any more; and, lifting up his finger, as he saw Cajare about to reply, he said, in a tone of command, "Monsieur le Baron de Cajare, obey the king's commands! Descend the staircase, take your place in the carriage which is now waiting for you, and surrender yourself at the royal prison of the Bastille

"without another word, or I will report your contumacy to his majesty."

The baron's haughty air instantly sunk; and, without taking notice of any one, without bow or word of adieu, he crossed the room and descended to the hall. Pierre Morin followed; but before he did so, he turned towards Ernest de Nogent, saying, "Monsieur de Nogent, you will be good enough to remain here till I come back;" and then, proceeding with his quick, noiseless step, down the stairs, he saw the Baron de Cajate into his carriage, and two guards take their seats in the vehicle beside him.

While these events had been taking place, a number of people had gathered together in the court of the chateau, some from the neighbouring hamlet, some from the woods where they had been destroying the wolves; and manifold were the inquiries of "What is the matter—what is the matter?"

At length the inquiry was pronounced close to Pierre Morin, who stood on the steps before the great gateway, where the carriage had been drawn up. As soon as he heard it, he turned round to those who spoke, and pronounced the magical words, "*Enlèvement de police*," an arrest by the police; and, at the sound, the very boldest drew three or four steps back, with countenances far paler than they had been before.

Ay, the very men who not many years afterwards marched to Paris, and aided to dye the streets of the capital with the blood of many of the best, the bravest, and the noblest in the land, now drew back in terror at the very name of that redoubtable police, whose whole real power, like almost every power on earth, was derived from the fears of those upon whom it was exercised. The carriage rolled rapidly away, after Pierre Morin had handed the paper which he held to one of the soldiers in the inside, and he himself turned his steps again into the mansion of Monsieur de Nogent.

In the meanwhile, those whom he had left behind in the library of the chateau, had continued gazing upon each other with some degree of painful expectation; but Annette recollected the kind, nay, the affectionate manner, in which the very man, who seemed to possess such power, had spoken to her in the forest, and the moment Pierre Morin again appeared, she advanced towards him, saying, "Let me speak with Monsieur Morin for a moment."

"Oh, sir!" she said, in a low voice, as soon as she was near enough to speak without her words being overheard, "when last I saw you you expressed yourself kindly and tenderly towards me; let me beseech you to spare Monsieur de Nogent as far as possible. Pray, remember, sir, he only came hither to see his father, who was then supposed to be dying; and, though that father is better, yet have some consideration for him too."

Pierre Morin heard her in silence, looking in her face with a smile of kindly meaning.

"My dear young lady," he said, at length, "you mistake the whole business; I have no power in this matter: I am a mere instrument. But do not be frightened; I have nothing to say to Monsieur de Nogent which would pain him or alarm you."

"Sir," he continued, turning to Ernest, "this young lady has been pleading for you, as if I had some authority of my own in this

business; but you very well know I am a mere agent, as I have just told her. I must therefore inform you, that his majesty commands you to return to your regiment immediately. He has directed me to say, that, as far as he is concerned, he pardons you, in consideration of your father's state of health. The general under whose command you serve will reprimand you for being absent without leave, should he think it necessary. The cause of such an humble individual as myself being commanded to convey this message to you, rather than a military officer, is simply that I was ordered down hither in haste to arrest the Baron de Cajarc, whose offence against his majesty has been in some degree mixed up with the question of your absence without leave. You will understand, sir, that the king's order is peremptory that you depart for your regiment instantly. I will now take my leave."

It was in vain the Baron de Nogent and his son pressed Pierre Morin to take some refreshment before he went; he retired at once, taking leave of Annette as he passed, and whispering a single brief sentence in her ear.

The words that Pierre Morin addressed to Annette were merely these: "Do not be surprised or alarmed at anything you may hear when you return home."

But, as always happens, imagination instantly attached the idea of coming evil to the injunction not to fear, and Annette's fancy suggested that some accident or misfortune must have befallen the Count de Castelnau during her absence. She had now learned to feel that there were other persons in the world who might be loved as well as himself, but that did not make her love him differently or less than before; and she hastened to quit her two companions, notwithstanding all the interest which she had learned to take in them, in order to return to him towards whom all the affections of her heart had been given from infancy with high, pure, filial love.

The baron and Ernest de Nogent would fain have detained her, at least for a short time; but she would not stay, saying, with a smile, that as she had seen all their enemies frustrated, and even sickness put to flight, her errand was over, and she must hasten back.

Ernest led her down to her horse; and though there was many a thing in his heart that he would fain have found a moment to utter, yet, perhaps from the impossibility of saying all in so short a space as that which was now afforded him, he remained silent till they reached the bottom of the staircase. There, however, he paused and detained her for an instant, asking with a look of entreaty, "May I not accompany you on your ride?"

"No, no, indeed!" replied Annette. "Pray remember the commands you have received, and return to your regiment without the delay even of an hour."

"I will," he answered, "I will; but will you not say one word to comfort and console me in thus parting from all I hold dear, for a time the limits of which I know not?"

"What can I say?" rejoined Annette. "What can I say? All I can do is," she added—and, as the spot where they stood was shadowed by a large buttress which crossed the window, the blush

with which her words were accompanied could hardly be seen—
 "All I can do is, to beg you to be careful and prudent for the sake of those here—of all who love and esteem you. You have run a great risk already, that I cannot but tremble to think of what might be the consequence of any other act of rashness; and now, go! pray go quickly. Fare you well!"

Thus saying, she turned towards the door; but Ernest detained her for one moment longer, to press his lips again and again upon her hand. Again he felt that it trembled in his own; and her agitation, coupled with the words that he spoke, gave an assurance to his heart which was not a little consoling to him.

CHAPTER XVII.

WITH her eyes bent down towards her saddle-bow, and her cheek still somewhat glowing, Annette departed, proceeding at a quick pace up the hill upon the slope of which the château of Castel Nogent was built. When she had passed the acclivity, however, she tightened the rein and suffered the horse to go on at a walk, thinking deeply over all that had occurred. Again and again she asked her heart, "What are these sensations that I feel towards Ernest de Nogent? Is this love?"

She could no longer conceal from herself that he was not to her the same as other men; but she would not believe, or perhaps I should say she would not admit, that it could be love which she felt. The time was so short, their meetings so few, that she could not, she would not, allow that it could be love. But yet Annette was not only now convinced that she did feel different sensations towards the young Lord of Castel Nogent from those which she had ever experienced before towards any human being; but, upon reflection, she found that her whole conduct had been such as to give him hope and encouragement; and she blushed as if a thousand eyes had been upon her at the presence of that conviction in her heart.

We have shown that Annette de St. Morin had been tempted, a night or two before, to shut her eyes to the consideration of her own feelings, and to shrink from the examination of the new passion which was insidiously taking possession of her heart: but, though she might do this, Annette had been taught from her earliest days, never so to shrink from the examination of her own conduct, never so to shut her eyes to the result of any action that she had actually done; and she now carefully and thoughtfully inquired to what she had plighted and pledged herself by her demeanour towards Ernest de Nogent. It might, indeed, be a question, whether she examined fairly; because Inclination, in all our dealings with our own heart, is at the ear of the judge; and perhaps Annette did give a little more weight to every word she had spoken, to every look and gesture favourable to Ernest, than she would have done, had he been less agreeable to her. The general result, however, was right; it was, that she had given him a degree of encouragement which she never could retract with honour, and, as a consequence of that very encouragement, she felt herself bound

to tell all that had passed, even including the thoughts and feelings of her own mind and heart; to the person who had been to her, as she herself said, more than a father.

The anticipation of doing so, however, agitated and troubled her far more than she could have believed anything of the kind would do. How to begin the tale she knew not; how to go on with it was equally perplexing; how to express what were her feelings, what were her thoughts, made the colour rise in her cheek, and her eyes sink to the ground even while she asked herself the question.

Her horse went now merely at a walk, but she urged him not on either by voice or whip; and, so far from hastening homeward, she took a somewhat longer path through the woods, not remarking that clouds had gathered in the sky while she had remained at Castel Nogent, and that the sultry heat of the air portended the coming of a storm. So it was, however. Over the tops of the tall trees might be seen gathering dull leaden masses of dense vapour, and the breath of the air had not the balminess of the preceding days, but was both sultry and oppressive in the highest degree. It could not be called fiery, like the gale that blows over the sands of Egypt; but it felt moist, though hot and difficult to breathe, as if it were borne from the depths of fens and morasses, exhaling deadly vapours under the rays of an ardent sun. Still, between the hard edges of the heavy clouds, the blue sky appeared, especially towards the zenith, where the great orb of day continued pouring on his flood of sovereign splendour, as if at once careless and unconscious of all the storms and tempests which might vex the earth below. The hum of the insect world, which had been busy in the morning, was now still; the voice of the birds, which had resounded through the woods and the valleys, was now reduced to a few short notes, begotten perhaps in gladness of heart, but terminated apparently in apprehension of some coming evil.

To all these warrings, however, Annette was blind, so busy was she in the world of her own heart; and the only external thing that caught her attention was the fretfulness of her horse. Attributing it to thirst from heat and exercise, she guided the animal to the bank of the stream; and casting down the rein upon his neck, she let him drink, gazing with apparent interest upon the reflection of her beautiful jennet's head in the water, but, in truth, seeing nothing but the images within her own breast. She was thus sitting calmly, with her hands resting on her knee, her head bent down, and her eyes fixed upon the clear smooth stream, when suddenly a flash of intense brightness blazed over the glistening expanse of water, followed instantly by a loud clap of thunder, which made the woods echo around. The horse threw its head suddenly back from the river, reared, plunged, and darted forward; and before Annette could make any effort to save herself, she was cast headlong into the stream.

The water was not very deep, and the servants flew in an instant to the assistance of one whom the whole household loved; but still, when they drew her forth from the stream, she was to all appearance lifeless. With the tears and loud lamentations in which the excitable people of the south of France indulge on all occasions of grief, the servants bore the form of Annette on towards the

chateau; but when they arrived there they found nothing but faces of bustle and anxiety. Horses and postillions were standing in the court-yard; good old Donnine was giving manifold orders regarding various packages of ladies' gear which other servants were bringing down; and the great family coach, as well as the old *chaise de poste*, was drawn out into the principal court-yard. All betokened preparations for an immediate journey; but all this bustle was turned instantly into silent consternation, as poor Annette was carried into the chateau. They bore her forward into a large saloon on the ground floor; but as they stretched her on one of the long hard sofas of that day, some signs of returning animation began to show themselves. Her beautiful hands closed with a convulsive motion, as if she felt pain, and it became clear that life was not extinct.

The sounds of lamentation and dismay which had followed Mademoiselle de St. Morin into the house, soon reached the ears of the Count de Castelneau; and, after a vain inquiry, he came down himself, followed by his two medical attendants, who happened at the moment to be with him.

To behold her he loved best on earth lying there, pale as a withered flower, her beautiful dark hair fallen about her face and neck, her eyes closed, her lips bloodless, might well affect any man deeply, and doubtless it greatly moved the Count de Castelneau; but it was not such sights, nor such events, that produced those attacks of illness under which he had lately suffered. His lip quivered a little, the gaze of his eye grew more intense and anxious, and the muscles of the brow contracted in a certain degree; but he had every command over himself, and asked in a clear, calm voice, "How did this happen?"

The tale was soon told; but even as it was telling, the surgeon, who was luckily present, exclaimed, "She is not dead!" and, drawing forth his lancet, he proceeded to employ such means as he thought necessary to recall poor Annette to consciousness. At first, the blood flowed with difficulty, but soon it came in a fuller stream, and in a few moments she opened her eyes faintly, and then closed them again, murmuring an indistinct word or two with her lips. It were tedious to tell all that was done to restore her to recollection; but let it suffice that, in the space of about three quarters of an hour, Mademoiselle de St. Morin, who was suffering, not from the temporary suspension of animation produced by immersion in the water, but from the stunning effects of her fall, completely recovered her speech and consciousness; and holding out her hand to Monsieur Castelneau, she said, "Do not fear!—do not fear, my dear father. I am not much hurt; I am better now."

A glistening drop came into the count's eyes; but he replied tranquilly, "Thank God! my Annette, you are not much hurt. These gentlemen assure me that such is the case; but be composed for a little while, and do not speak yourself, for I have some news to give you. I will leave you for a few minutes, and return to tell you more."

The count was gone about half an hour, and when he did come back, he found Annette apparently much recovered, though she was in truth severely bruised, and in considerable pain.

"What are the tidings, my dear father?" she asked, as he sat down again beside her. "They are no evil tidings, I hope?"

"Nol oh nol!" replied the count; "do not alarm yourself, my Annette; but I fear I cannot remain to witness your recovery, dear child. The king has sent me an order to come to Paris without an instant's delay. The cause assigned for this command is much suspicion of disaffection, in consequence of my long absence from the capital. If this be the real cause, such suspicions can be cleared away in an hour."

As he spoke, the count fell into deep thought, and remained with his eyes fixed upon the ground for several moments, while Annette gazed up in his face with an eager and inquiring look, as if seeking to scan her guardian's feelings, and gather more information than his words afforded. No one, perhaps, was so well qualified to learn from the countenance of Monsieur de Castelneau what was passing in his heart as Annette de St. Morin; but even to her his face was a very unreadable book on most occasions. In the present instance, however, she was right in some degree; and she said, "You doubt whether that suspicion be the real cause or not?—but you must not go without me. I can go very well; I am recovered now; I can go quite well."

The count bent down his head, and kissed her brow, saying, "I am afraid, my dear Annette, that I am very selfish with regard to you, and that my love for your society has but too often prevented me from giving you the advantage of mingling in the world as much as you ought to do; but yet, my dear child, I am not so basely selfish as to rob you of health, perhaps of life, for any comfort or consolation whatsoever. It is quite impossible that you should go with me in your present state; equally impossible, I grieve to say, that I should stay till you are better. These gentlemen of art, however, inform me that if you remain tranquil here, I need be under no apprehension for your health. One of them I must take with me, as it might be dangerous for me to travel without assistance. Monsieur Merle, however, will see you every day; and you must let me know by letter what is the exact state of my dear child's health. I, in return, will write to you as soon as I reach Paris; and you shall speedily hear both how I am, and what is the real cause of this sudden call. It is strange, that after eighteen years' absence, I should have any enemy so pertinacious as to inspire suspicions of my conduct in the mind of the king!"

"You do not think," said Annette, in a low voice, and with a glance towards the other persons who were in the room, which made the count bend down his ear to listen, "you do not think that the Baron de Cajare can have anything to do with this?"

The count started, exclaiming, "What makes you think so?"

The colour came slightly into Annette's cheek, as she replied, "I have scarcely any reason; but I recollect he one day said, when he was speaking in a way which surprised and pained me, that means might be easily found of forcing you out of this old chateau, to what he called the intellectual pleasures of the capital."

The slight cloud which hung upon the count's brow cleared away in a moment. "Ha! Monsieur de Cajare?" he said, "is it so? You are doubtless right, my Annette. I have known men sent to the

Bastile at the instigation of intriguing scoundrels, for a much less object than that which Monsieur de Cajare has in view. He shall find himself mistaken, however."

"He has done so already," replied Annette; "for he was down at Castel Nogent this morning, and seemed to think he had everything and everybody in his power; but in the midst of it all an agent of police came in, arrested him, and sent him to the Bastile."

"Indeed!" said the count, "indeed! But what more, my Annette; you seem to have more to say?"

"I must forbid it to be said now; I am afraid," said the physician, advancing to Annette's side, "it is neither fit for you, count, nor for Mademoiselle de St. Morin. Remember, my dear sir, you have still some business of an agitating nature to go through."

"Agitating!" said the count; "you do not suppose that talking of, or making arrangements for the only one event that is certain in human life, I mean death, can have anything agitating in it to me. My dear Annette," he went on, "I am about to take a long journey, and having scarcely recovered from a severe fit of illness, I have thought it right once more to make my will in form. I have also laid out a large portion of your fortune in the purchase of the small lordship of St. Aubin on the Lot. You will take my word for it, my dear child, that it was an advantageous purchase; the deeds, properly made out in your name, are in the hands of my notary up stairs, but you must sign a paper signifying your consent to my thus employing your money on your behalf. As this good man," he added, pointing to Monsieur Merle, "shakes his head at this conversation, I will again leave you for awhile, and then come back to you for a moment before I depart."

Monsieur de Castelneau was absent for a greater length of time than before, and he then returned with his own notary and another member of the law. They carried with them various deeds and papers, which they presented to Annette, and explained to her as being the titles to the estate of St. Aubin, which her guardian was said to have purchased with money belonging to her.

The sum did indeed so far belong to her—although it proceeded from a moiety of his own revenues, which he had laid by ever since he had succeeded to the title of the Count de Castelneau—that he had always called it to himself Annette's portion; and he had thus suffered it to accumulate, in remembrance of the promise he had made, to give her a dowry according to the rank in which he brought her up. The laws of France, however, have always inter-meddled with the disposal of private property, in a manner ever vexatious and often most inconvenient; and, in order to avoid all the difficulties which might thus have occurred, the Count of Castelneau had been obliged to have recourse to this method of purchasing property for Annette, which she could not be deprived of, let what might become of any other sum which he left to her.

The formal part of the business was soon over; the notaries took the deeds away with them, but gave her an acknowledgment that they held them for her use; and in a minute after, one of the servants came to inform the count that mademoiselle's clothes had been removed from the carriage, and that all was ready for his own departure.

"I must now bid you farewell, my Annette," replied the count; "but since I have heard what you had to tell me regarding Monsieur de Cajare, I go with a mind at ease. Previously to your return, my poor girl, I had fondly hoped that you would be the companion of my journey, and good Donnine had bustled herself for your departure. That would have been exactly what Monsieur de Cajare desired, no doubt; but this accident disappoints him as well as me, and I now leave you mistress of Castelneau till my return. I have but one injunction to give you, my Annette, which is, to be careful of yourself. You will be kind to all others, I know; but I shall be very, very anxious regarding you; for these two sad dangers that have befallen you have shaken my confidence in your safety. Be careful, therefore, my Annette, and let me hear from you as soon as it is possible."

Thus saying he left her, and a few unwonted tears rose in the fair girl's eyes; for, though her nature was not an apprehensive one, and experience had not yet taught her the instability of every earthly thing, yet she could not part from the friend and guardian of her infancy and youth, without a feeling of loneliness, ay, and of fear; not lest any evil should fall upon herself, but lest the fatigues of the way, or the intrigues of evil men at court, might impair his health and affect his happiness or life.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THOUGH it may soon be our duty to follow the course of some of our other characters, to inquire into the proceedings of Monsieur de Cajare, to accompany Ernest de Nogent on his journey, or to trace the adventures of Monsieur de Castelneau, we must for the present dwell with Annette in the old chateau, and speak of some events which took place within a very short time after the departure of the count himself. As we have said, poor Annette felt sad and lonely, and, though good Donnine did her best to soothe and to console her, and though the well-regulated mind of the young lady herself taught her that to give way to apprehension was neither wise nor right, and that it was a duty to amuse her mind by every means in her power, yet the next two or three hours were very heavy to her, and she experienced, though but in a slight degree, that desolation of heart which every one must have felt still more deeply who has lost a dear and valued friend for ever. As the evening came on, also, the effects of her fall were more sensibly felt; she became somewhat feverish towards night, and the physician, who returned to see her, gave her some drugs to allay the pain and tranquillize her nerves, and directed her immediately to retire to rest.

Although it was not yet dark, she did as he directed, and left the saloon vacant. The evening sun streamed into it cheerfully, and traced a natural dial on the floor, marking the hours till the ray faded. The light grew more and more dim in the chamber; the black oak carvings of the ceiling were lost in the obscurity; and the moon began to show herself in the heavens, triumphing, yet but timidly, in the absence of her great and glorious rival of the day.

"It was at that hour and moment that the door of the saloon opened quietly, and a lady entered, leaning on the arm of a gentleman in dark clothing. No servant preceded them, no attendant followed; and the lady, sinking into one of the large arm-chairs, covered her eyes with her hands, murmuring, "Am I here once more?"

For several minutes she remained evidently weeping, but in silence and without violence: they seemed the tears of memory, and flowed by in the same solemn silence with which all the objects of the past march in review before the eye of conscience. The gentleman did not seat himself, but stood by her side uncovered; and, after a few minutes, he walked forward to the window, and gazed out towards the west, where a faint greenish film of light, the last effort of day, still hung like a curtain before the stars.

"I fear, madam," he said, at length, returning to the lady's side, "I fear, madam, that if we do not proceed quickly, we shall lose the little light that remains, and be obliged to call some of the men to bring a lamp, which may be unpleasant."

"I am ready, my good friend; I am ready," she replied: "but you may well imagine what are the feelings with which I behold all these well-remembered scenes, where the bubble of happiness first rose upon the stream of my life, and then burst and passed away for ever. But come! I could guide you in the dark; for if the burning of the heart could communicate its intense fires to the earthly frame, every one of my footsteps, when last I trod the way from that chamber to this must have been printed indelibly on the floor. Come, come, come, we shall soon find the place where my heart was broken."

Thus saying, she led the way across the room to a smaller door than that by which she had entered, and on the opposite side. Taking her way through it, she proceeded by a corridor to the end of that wing of the chateau, and then passed the door of Anne's bed-chamber to the extreme west, where one of the large towers contained within itself two or three of the best rooms in the castle. The door which there ended the corridor was locked; but the gentleman who was with her had a number of keys in his hand, and, with extraordinary ease and precision, he selected the one which the keyhole required, applied it, and gave her entrance.

Those were days in which window-shutters to the higher rooms of a country house were almost unknown, and consequently in the apartments they now entered, which looked full towards the spot where the sun had set not half an hour before, the light was much more strong than at the opposite side of the building. Even here it was very faint, but there was still enough to guide the lady across the ante-chamber to the door of the room beyond. She laid her hand upon the lock, but paused for a moment as if under the influence of some strong emotion; and then, conquering her irresolution, she threw open the door, disclosing a bed-room fitted up with great taste and luxury: a toilette-table festooned with velvet and gold; a bed with hangings of the same rich materials; tall mirrors in beautiful frames; and in the centre panel of the wainscot, on the opposite side of the room, a full-length portrait of a gentleman in a military dress; apparently about to mount his horse. One foot was in the stirrup, and a hand was upon the mane;

and while the countenance was turned so as to look full into the room, the other hand, by the painter's skill, appeared to stretch forth from the canvass, and wave a hat and plume, as if bidding adieu to the spectators.

There was an air of joy, and youth, and bright hilarity in the whole figure and countenance, which not even the dim twilight of that hour could altogether conceal, and upon it fixed the lady's eyes the moment she opened the door. She pressed her hand upon her heart, looked around the room with an expression almost of fear; and then, advancing with a quick step, she gazed earnestly upon the portrait, till, sinking on her knees before it, she murmured a short prayer. She remained there scarcely a minute; but ere she rose many a tear bedewed the spot where she knelt, and it was with difficulty she could restrain them from flowing for some time afterwards.

Advancing into a small dressing-room beyond, and approaching the huge mantelpiece of black oak, she said, laying her hand upon a large carved moulding, "It is here;" and she ran her hand along it more than once, seeming to press upon the various flowers and figures with which it was ornamented. As she did so, she began to tremble, saying, "Some one must have opened it since, or else they must have discovered and closed it already. It used to open with a touch."

"Let me try," said the gentleman who was with her; "it may well have got rusty in twenty years."

"That rose!" said the lady; "that rose! I am sure it was that or the one next to it."

Her companion advanced and pressed upon the spot in the cornice which she pointed out. It instantly gave way under his stronger hand; the moulding fell forward like the front of some ancient scrutoire, and at the same moment a parchment rolled out and dropped at the lady's feet. She instantly picked it up and pressed it to her heart, and then, turning to the names that were signed at the end, endeavoured to read them, but in vain.

"It matters not," she said, "it matters not! This is the contract. There is nothing else there: let us begone."

"It is better to be quite sure," replied her companion; and putting his hand into the cavity from which the parchment had fallen, he speedily produced another, though very much smaller in size.

"Here is another deed," he said; "most likely the procuration of some relation."

"True," she answered; "true, I had forgot that; but it is not of as much consequence as the other. Now let us go."

"You had better do so, madam," replied her companion; "for the carriage will carry you to Figeac speedily. I must remain, however, and see that these men do their duty, though the search is all nonsense, and they will find nothing."

"I suppose so," answered the lady; "but how happens it, I wonder, that such suspicions should arise without a cause?"

"Some enemy," replied the gentleman. "Unhappily, a minister's ears are always open to every accusation. To be accused, is often as bad as to be criminal; and the Count de Castelnau may well think himself lucky, to have nothing worse to undergo than a

mere journey to Paris, as, I believe, some powerful enemy has accused him."

"That enemy has been my best friend," replied the lady; "but I will hasten away now, and wait for you at Figeac."

Thus saying, she retired from the dressing-room, and again paused before the picture in the other chamber; but, as time acts upon the memories of objects past, the evening light had acted upon that portrait. When she had before seen it, the form, the features, the dress, were all distinct, though the colouring was somewhat grey and cold; now all was confused and obscure; there was neither hue nor exact form left, and the vague figure of a man mounting his horse, was traced, more by the aid of recollection than the eye.

The lady passed on; and the gentleman who was with her, taking care to close every door behind them, and to remove all trace of their visit, followed her quickly, and accompanied her through the same corridors and rooms which they had passed before, down the great staircase into the court-yard. A number of men were drawn up there in deep silence, at a short distance from a carriage to which were attached four horses; and at some distance beyond, appeared a number of servants of the Count de Castelneau. The latter, however, seemed either stupified, or overawed; for they remained motionless and unconcerned while the stranger handed the lady into the vehicle. "As he was about to retire from the door of the carriage, she bent forward and said, "I am sure you would suffer me to see her if it were possible?"

"It is wholly impossible, madam," he answered, "without ruin to all;" and, bowing low, he retired into the chateau.

During the greater part of that night, lights were seen in the various parts of the building, and the servants of the Count de Castelneau remained watching, with some anxiety, proceedings which caused them great apprehension, but which they could not prevent. Strange to say, however, the whole passed with so much quietness and silence, that neither Annette, nor her maid, who slept in a neighbouring chamber, nor old Donnine, who, ever since the young lady had been a child, claimed a room as close to that of Mademoiselle de St. Morin as possible, was ever awakened.

Early on the following day, when Donnine, who retained all the matutinal habits of her youth, rose, and proceeded to resume the cares of the household which she superintended, the whole bevy of maidens, under her sage charge and governance, assailed her at once with accounts of the domiciliary visit which had been paid to the chateau by a large body of police. They had gone through all the count's apartments, she was told; had examined his papers, and opened all his cabinets and drawers; at least, so the servants inferred; for, be it remarked, they were themselves excluded from the chambers where the police were pursuing their avocations, except when some information or assistance was necessary. They, moreover, told Donnine, that the gentleman who had commanded the police had taken particular pains not to make any noise or disturbance, and had said that there was no use of searching Mademoiselle de St. Morin's apartments, or waking her from her sleep. On receiving this information, Donnine consulted with herself whe-

ther she should or should not inform her young lady of what had occurred, and she determined not to do so till Annette had risen and breakfasted.

All her wise precautions were, however, in vain: for Annette's maids, who, amongst other good qualities, possessed the peculiar faculty of the parrot and the magpie, repeating, like them, everything that she heard, caught some ten words of the intelligence as she leaned over the stairs, and, running instantly into Annette's room, woke her, with the tidings that the house had been visited by the police, who had carried off every paper they could find. With the common babble, in short, of persons in her situation, she told all that she knew, and a great deal more; and the consequence was, that Annette, who was still suffering considerably from the effects of her fall, and who would certainly not have risen that day had it not been for some extraordinary cause, began to dress herself immediately, and was on the eve of going down, when Donnine appeared, to inquire how she had passed the night.

Without delay, Annette proceeded through the chambers which had been visited during the night, and found that the papers had not been carried away, though they had been examined. One scrutoire and one desk she found closed by a double seal connected by a thick piece of parchment; and after considering for some moments what this appearance might indicate, and what should be her own conduct, she thought that the best plan of proceeding would be to write immediately to the Baron de Nogent, asking advice from his better experience. She accordingly did so, and at the same time despatched a letter by a special courier to the Count de Castelnau, hoping that information of what had taken place might reach him before he quitted Limoges.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE Count de Castelnau leaned back in his carriage and thought of Annette, while the slow wheels, at the rate of about five miles an hour, rolled him onward towards Paris. Perhaps never had he known the tediousness of life before, for the thoughts of an active and busy mind had always furnished sufficient employment for each leisure moment; but now he had wherewithal to measure the minutes, though not to occupy them, and each mile that he was borne away from the society which he loved best, seemed but to increase the slowness of time's tardy flight. There was nothing on the road to amuse or interest him: he had seen every tree and every stone, in the course of the first twenty miles, a hundred times before; and the physician, who sat beside him in the carriage, after having made a vain attempt to converse upon indifferent topics, had sunk back into the corner, where he now lay pillowed on the soft bosom of sleep.

The count then communed with himself, and the chief subject of thought was Annette de St. Morin. He asked himself what were his real feelings, what his own most secret wishes and purposes. He was a great doubter of his own heart. He knew it—that sad, frail, wily thing, the human heart—he knew it by experience to be

the most deceitful of all things; and, alas, still worse! more deceitful to those who trust it than to any others. He asked himself, whether, were Annette herself willing to give him her hand, he would really seek to wed her. He answered, "No!" boldly, almost indignantly. Such a purpose, such a wish, he thought, had never entered his mind. Not to lose her society was all that he desired. But the next question was, how her constant companionship was to be preserved without wedding her? Could he keep her who was so formed for domestic happiness lingering out her days almost in solitude?—could he condescend to watch her lest her heart should choose for itself: to exclude all who might please, attract, or win her? Would it be wise?—would it be just? Oh, no! his own heart forbade the thought at once; but, then, with what art it suggested again that the only means of gaining both objects, of retaining Annette for ever near him, and yet suffering her to know all the blessings of domestic life, and all the high pleasures of well chosen society, was to make her his own by the bond of marriage. She had never yet, he thought, seen any one to love but himself. All her first affections were his: those affections were evidently like the love of a daughter to a father, it was true; but might they not easily be changed into warmer and tenderer feelings? As he reflected upon it, however, he shrunk from the idea; he thought almost with horror of losing the fond name of father which she gave him, even to assume that of husband; and he covered his eyes with his hand, and turned away his mind from the subject.

"I will think of it no more," he said; but alas! to have thought of it at all was a step gained by the adversary, from which he was only to be driven by pain and sorrow. The count kept his resolution for the time, however; turned his mind to other things, asking himself a thousand questions regarding his sudden call to Paris; and busied his imagination in inquiring, who had really laid the charge against him, and what that charge actually was. There was a vague apprehension presented itself from time to time: a spectre rising from the shadowy night of the past, and flitting before his eyes, faint and indistinct, yet dark and horrible; but he would not, he dared not, suffer that spectre to come near. He drove it away with a scoff while it was yet afar, though had he suffered it to approach close to his eyes, it would have overpowered him altogether. He concluded with Annette—he chose so to conclude—that his accuser must be the Baron de Cajare; that the object was to bring his fair ward to Paris, and the charge was one of those idle accusations which the French government in that day was always very willing to employ, in order to force the provincial nobles into the capital.

At length the carriage stopped, in order that the horses might be changed, at a little inn and post-house between Cahors and Limoges, which he had known well in former years, and where, as it was a pleasant spot in a beautiful country, he had spent sometimes weeks together. The hostess had been a very gay and pretty woman, a year or two younger than himself; and with her, in his early days of levity, he had often indulged in many an idle and over-familiar jest. It was now night; the country round he could not see; but there came to the side of the carriage an old woman,

bearing the light, and courtesying low to the strange gentleman, as she announced herself as the post-mistress.

"The count gazed at her attentively; she was the same gay personage he had formerly known; but oh, how changed! She had sunk in those twenty or two-and-twenty years, into a coarse and withered old dame. The freshness of the cheek, the neat waist, the smart foot and ankle, were all gone. Much exposure and work, as well as some care and anxiety, had left her brown and shrivelled, and not a trace of beauty or of youth remained.

Monsieur de Castelneau gazed and felt how time had passed: and, as the idea he had entertained of wedding Annette came up for an instant before his mind, he applied the homily to his own heart, and a sneering smile came upon his lip at the thought of his own weakness.

It rarely happens, when we are tempted to evil thoughts or evil deeds, that some warning is not whispered in our ear, that some obstacle is not thrown in our way. It is only, in short, when our heart takes part with the temptation that we fall, and then, fall without palliation. The count, however, was eager to prevent his mind from yielding to what he felt was wrong, and he made the best use of the little incident which had occurred. He looked out at the post-mistress; she did not know him in the least. He spoke to her for moment or two; she did not even recognise his voice.

"I am as much changed as she is," he said to himself; "and when I can imagine that ardent youth, in its first freshness, can feel passion for age like this, then I may expect that Annette may love me as a wife should love her husband. He cast the idea once more from him, as a thing vain and absurd, and, made the postillions drive on as quickly as possible.

The journey of that day, however, was, of course, short, from the lateness of the hour at which the count had taken his departure; but the act of travelling seemed rather to have done him good than otherwise. He slept better than he had done for many nights previous, and woke early the following day prepared to pursue his way. His valet appeared to dress him as soon as he was up and had performed his devotions; and, as the man bustled about the room, first bringing one article to his master and then another, he seemed struck with something which appeared upon the table, and handed the count a note, asking him if he had seen it.

Monsieur de Castelneau took it from his hand; looked at the seal; then with a contracted brow and somewhat wild expression of countenance gazed in the man's face; and then, as if with a great effort, tore open the note.

It contained but three words, "Go in peace!" but these words seemed to take a load off the count's mind, and he asked eagerly who had placed the note upon his table. All his own servants, and all the servants of the inn, denied, with every appearance of truth, that they had done anything of the kind, and the count was obliged to proceed on his way without any farther information concerning the event.

At Limoges, Monsieur de Castelneau received Annette's letter, informing him of the visit of the police, and the search for papers which had been made at theateau. These tidings, though they

led him to suppose that the charge was somewhat serious, only made him smile, as he well knew that nothing could be found at Castelneau which could show him to be implicated in any designs against the government. He answered Annette's letter before he set out, telling her how confident he was in his own innocence, and giving her the still better intelligence of his hourly improving health, and of the great benefit which the act of travelling seemed to produce. He then hastened on to Paris; and we shall not pause on any farther incidents of his journey, which passed quietly by, with only such little accidents and inconveniences as befall all travellers in those days.

The count alighted at one of those large furnished hotels which were then common in Paris, but which have very generally given way to more convenient places of abode for the lonely traveller. It was about three o'clock in the day when he arrived; but the aspect of the great city, after having for so many years enjoyed the calm and quiet scenes of the country, lay heavy and gloomy upon his heart. There were none of the sights or sounds which refresh the eye or the ear; there was nothing to divert any sense from the consciousness of being in the midst of a wide and heartless multitude, without one feeling in common with any of the human beings who surrounded him. The count was somewhat fatigued also, and he therefore determined to pass the rest of that day in repose, and to wait until the next ere he visited the Duke of Choiseul, who had signed the letter commanding him to appear in Paris.

It proved unfortunate that he did so; for, on sending the next day to inquire at what hour the duke would receive him, he found that the minister had quitted Paris the preceding night for his country seat, called Chanteloup, in the beautiful valley of Arpajon, and was not expected to return for several days. Knowing that in the court of Louis the Fifteenth, as in all other despotic courts, prompt obedience at the first summons is always looked upon with much favour, the count now hesitated as to what course he should pursue, in order to show that he had lost not a moment's time in executing the king's commands.

Neither Versailles nor Arpajon was very far from Paris; but the count, from his old knowledge of monarchs and statesmen, judged that it would be best to show his obedience to the minister even before the king, and he consequently ordered horses to be put to his carriage, and took the road to Chanteloup.

Perfectly at his ease in regard to any offence against the government, Monsieur de Castelneau gazed forth upon the country, and endeavoured to amuse his mind with the scenery between Paris and Arpajon. As every one must know who has travelled on the road to Etampes, there is nothing very striking to be seen by the way, except occasionally some beautiful chateaux and parks, and the hill of Montlhery, with its curious old tower. But just at the moment that the count was gazing forth from the window of the carriage, and raising his eyes towards that tower with the smile of one who recognises an old friend, a carriage, with a musketeer on either side, passed him at a rapid rate on the way towards Paris. In the inside of the carriage was a gentleman, whom Monsieur de Castelneau instantly recognised as the Maron de Cajarc; but the

two vehicles had rolled past each other before he could at all see who was the person that occupied another seat in the carriage with the baron.

A few minutes more brought the count to the chateau of Chanteloup; and passing through the park, he was soon in the great court. Hence he sent in a servant to demand audience of the minister. Everything now passed with the utmost rapidity; the innumerable domestics who were seen hurrying about the chateau, seemed endowed with superhuman agility; so quick were all their motions, so rapidly they came and disappeared. It was simply, however, that the character of their master, in this as in almost all cases, affected his dependants; and scarcely could the count alight from his carriage and enter the hall, ere the messenger who had gone to the duke returned, desiring him to follow. Passing through one or two rooms filled with most beautiful pictures, some of the Italian and French school, but more of the Flemish, the count was led to a large library, of which the servant threw open the door, announcing him in a loud tone.

On the other side of the room, seated at a table, and writing with the utmost rapidity, was a gentleman of very diminutive stature, extremely ugly in face, and with that dark saturnine complexion which is more commonly met with in the French capital than anywhere else. Yet there was something in that countenance so full of fire and animation, thought and intelligence, that the expression was worth all the beauty that ever was given to man. As soon as the count entered, the duke laid down his pen, rose from his seat, crossed the room with infinite grace and dignity, and, taking his visitor by the hand, pointed to a chair near a window which looked out upon the park, saying, "In one moment I shall be at your service; my letter is nearly finished. Your goodness will excuse me, I am sure. From that window you will find a fine view. Fancy it but a picture by Poussin, and you will have occupation for five minutes at least."

"It is from the hand of a greater master, my lord," replied the count, "whose pictures, to say the truth, I am fonder of contemplating than even those of Poussin himself."

"True, sir true," replied the duke, in his quick way; "I perfectly agree with you: but we value the handiwork of Poussin, perhaps, because we pay for it, more than the works of nature, because they are freely given by the bounty of God. We are a sad obtuse race, Monsieur le Comte, and we need to be flogged into liking what is good: we value nothing that we are not charged anything for; but, as I said, I will be at your service in a minute."

He then started himself once more at the table, while the count took the chair near the window, and gazed forth upon the valley of Arpajon. Its green freshness was cheering to his eye, and he certainly could not have found a more pleasant subject of contemplation than the soft calm valley, with the sweet little stream flowing in the midst.

While he sat there, it three or four times occurred that a secretary entered from a room at the side, and presented a paper to the duke in silence. The duke took it, glanced his eye rapidly over it, signed his name at the bottom, and gave it back again without a

world. All was rapid and energetic in his house as in the ministry, and not a moment was lost while business was going forward. At the end of about five minutes, or rather more, the letter was concluded, folded up, sealed, and the small silver bell, which stood at its right hand rung. Its tongue was scarcely still, and its place upon the table resumed, when a servant appeared and approached with a bow. The duke gave the man the letter, saying, "A horse and courier to Versailles. Back by four o'clock!"

The servant again bowed and retired; and the duke, laying down the pen which he had continued to hold, rose from his seat, and, seeming to get of the load of care, advanced towards the window where the count was seated, saying with a smile, "And now, Monsieur le Comte de Castelneau, to resume what we were talking about. That is a most beautiful scene, is it not?"

"I have seen more beautiful," replied the count, "and have just come from amongst them."

"That is the reason," replied the Duke de Choiseul, "why you and I estimate this view differently. You come from the bright scenes of Quercy, green fields, old castles, fine ruins, broad rivers, manifold streams and fountains. I recollect it all very well. I come from amidst grey houses, dusty streets, dull bureaus, in Paris; and from gold fringes, satin curtains, and burl tables at Versailles. Therefore this view strikes me as the sweetest thing the eye can look upon. But there is more in it still. You and I, had we the magic power of one of the necromancers whom good Monsieur Galland has told us of, and could bring hither whatever prospect we chose, would each pitch upon a very different view from the other, and yet we should both be right. This may seem very strange, but it is true."

"I can easily conceive it is, my lord," replied the count.

"In what way, in what way, may I ask?" said the Duke de Choiseul, with his peculiar grace of manner. "I would fain know if our reasonings on the subject are the same."

"I suppose, my lord," replied the count, in his usual calm and thoughtful tone,— "I suppose that you, continually busied in matters of the deepest importance, harassed with the cares and the wants of a whole nation, and daily contemplating matters in themselves vast, striking, and terrible, must naturally prefer, in a place where you seek temporary repose, all that is calm, quiet, and refreshing: softness without asperities, and variety without abruptness."

"Exactly, exactly!" replied the duke, his whole face lighting up with a smile; "and you, on your part, living in calm and quiet retirement, would prefer what is more bold and striking to the eye; something, in short, that excites the imagination through the sight, and stirs up within us a gentle sort of agitation, sufficient to give life and variety to thoughts that might otherwise wear and overload the mind."

"You have expressed my feelings on this subject, my lord," replied the count, "as if you could see into my breast."

"I do!" answered the Duke of Choiseul; "and therefore I say, Monsieur de Castelneau, that you may go back to Paris with the most perfect ease and tranquillity of mind. I want no further

conversation with you, to show me that you have not been mingling in the dangerous and exciting course of faction and sedition, otherwise you would love the calm scene as well as I do. You may return, then, at ease——"

"To Castelneau?" said the count.

"No, I must not exactly say that," replied the Duke of Choiseul, "tho' I have heard the king's pleasure on the subject. But you may go back to Paris with any inquietude; unless, indeed, you will do the duchess and myself the honour of dining here to-day, when I can show you some other pictures, as you say, not by so great a master as that, but perhaps by the finest painters who have ever imitated the works of the Great Artist of all."

"Nay, my lord," replied the count, with the smile: "I am but a rude countryman, and for many years have mingled little with society."

"I will not take a refusal," replied the duke. "I do not know that any one is expected, and therefore I will conduct you to the duchess, who will entertain you for half an hour while I conclude the business of the day: forgive me for preceding you, that I may show the way."

"There is one question, my lord," said Monsieur de Castelneau, as they went on, "which I would fain ask, if you will permit me."

"What is that, count? What is that?" said the duke. "I will answer freely if I can."

"It is simply, my lord," replied the count, "to whom am I indebted for the pleasant suspicion which it seems have been entertained of my conduct?"

"Nay, nay, nay! Monsieur de Castelneau," exclaimed the duke, with a laugh, "we must be upon honour with our good *mouchards*. Why, if we gave them up on every piece of information that we receive, there would be nothing but cudgeling one honest man or another of them in Paris, all day long."

"He was not a very honest man, my lord," replied the count, "who made this charge against me; and I strongly suspect that he was no *mouchard* either."

"Then you have your eye upon some one," said the duke immediately. "Whom do you suspect?"

"The Baron de Cajare," replied the count at once.

The Duke of Choiseul laughed. "How secrets betray themselves, Monsieur de Castelneau!" he said: "it is clear, then, you have some quarrel with the Baron de Cajare?"

"Not in the least, my lord duke," replied the count. "When last we met, we were upon friendly terms; but, though I have not betrayed the secret, I will tell it without hesitation. The Baron de Cajare somewhat covets the hand and fortune of a young lady under my care: he has not prospered much in his suit with her, and would fain have her and myself in Paris that he may pursue it further."

"Ha! is that it?" said the Duke of Choiseul with a thoughtful smile. "The Baron de Cajare is in the Bastille; at least, I trust he is there by this time, for he left me an hour ago to return thither. But come, let us join the duchess, count. She shall show you her collection of miniatures."

CHAPTER XX.

THE Duchess of Choiseul was a woman of very superior mind. She received the Count de Castelneau with kindness and affability, but with a degree of reserve; for it seems that she had known something of him in former years, when he was the Abbe de Castelneau, and she Countess de Stainville, her husband not having at that time reached the eminent station which he now filled. Her first recollections, therefore, of Monsieur de Castelneau were not favourable; but a very few minutes' conversation with him removed the bad impression; and when she heard of years passed in solitude in the country, when she heard him talk of his abhorrence of Paris, of his desire to return to the calm shades of Castelneau, and marked the distaste he felt towards the gay and glittering society of the capital, she saw evidently that he was a man upon whom time and thought had produced a beneficial effect, and whose heart had been ultimately amended, rather than depraved, by its commerce with the world. The hour which he spent with her alone was thus rendered not an unpleasant one. They spoke not of the past, but in all probability they both thought of it; and that thought, as the far retrospect of memory always does, mingled some melancholy, but of a sweet and gentle kind, with other feelings; so that, when the duke returned, it needed several minutes of the society of the most cheerful man in France to enliven the conversation and turn it into a gayer course.

The duke, who could, when he so pleased, lay aside entirely the minister and statesman, and appear simply as the highly accomplished French gentleman, now threw off the reserve of his station with the Count de Castelneau, and led him through the apartments of his chateau, showing him all those fine pictures, gems, coins, and other objects of art, for which Chanteloup was at one time famous. He found his companion nothing inferior to himself in taste or acquaintance with the arts, and much his superior in learning; and many an elaborate discussion took place upon the merits of this or that object, the minister conducting it with all his wit, fluency, and grace, Monsieur de Castelneau replying more shortly, but from a fund of knowledge and judgment which left little more to be said. There was a sufficient difference of opinion between the duke and his guest to make their communication varied and entertaining, yet a sufficient similarity to render it conversation rather than argument.

More than an hour was thus passed in that sort of conversation which was the greatest possible relief to the mind of Choiseul; and, on their return to the apartments of the duchess, they found her with a young gentleman in a military costume seated on a footstool at her feet, with his elbow leaning on the ground, and his eyes raised to the countenance of the lady. The moment the duke and his companion entered, the other gentleman rose, and the minister greeted him with a smile.

"Ah! Ernest," said the duke. "What brings you here, you wild youth? I hope this is not a new absence without leave?"

"Oh, no, my dear lord!" replied the other. "I have full leave at this moment; for, since I left my father on Saturday week, I have been at our head-quarters, received my reprimand, and obtained permission to come hither, to excuse myself to the king."

"Was your reprimand severe?" asked the duke, with a peculiar smile, well knowing that he had taken means to render it the contrary.

The young gentleman laughed. "Severe and cutting as the breath of the southerly wind," he said. "Oh, no! my lord, I owe you all thanks; but I am sure your own heart justifies you in having interceded for me."

"I should not have done it otherwise, Ernest, had you been my own son," replied Choiseul; "but though you had committed a fault which could not be passed over without some notice, yet the call to your father's sick-bed, to his death-bed as you had reason to think it—was an excuse valid in mitigation, especially when you were not actually in campaign, and when your presence was evidently not required with your regiment. It was not absolutely necessary that you should present yourself before the king; but perhaps it is better, in order that this affair may not stop your promotion. Your father is nearly well, I find. I had a letter from him this morning."

"The young gentleman replied that he had also heard from his father; and the duke, then turning to Monsieur de Castelnau, said: "You must allow me, count, to introduce you to a young gentleman from your own part of the country, a nephew of Madame de Choiseul, Monsieur de Nogent. Ernest, this is your neighbour, the Count de Castelnau."

The young gentleman started with surprise; but the count took his hand, expressing much pleasure in seeing him, and adding a commendation of the good old Baron Nogent; short, indeed, and simple, but in such terms as brought a glistening light into the son's eyes.

"Your good opinion of him, Monsieur de Castelnau," replied Ernest de Nogent, "must be most gratifying to him, as I know he esteems you highly. May I ask," he continued, "how was your fair ward when you left Castelnau, which must have been some days, I presume, after I quitted that part of the country myself?"

"I travelled but slowly," replied the count, "as I have been suffering much in health. Annette, I am happy to say, though not well enough to accompany me, was in no danger."

"Ill, ill!" exclaimed Ernest de Nogent, with a look that astonished not only the count, but Monsieur and Madame de Choiseul also, not a little, so eager, so anxious, so apprehensive was it. "The last time I saw her, she seemed in perfect health."

"I did not know that you were acquainted with her," said the count, with an air of more surprise than pleasure.

"Oh, yes!" answered Monsieur de Nogent, "though my acquaintance with Mademoiselle de St. Morin is of a very recent date, it is quite sufficient to interest me deeply in her welfare. It began by

my rendering her a slight service when she was attacked by a wolf."

"Oh, now I comprehend, now I comprehend!" exclaimed the count, taking his hand, and shaking it warmly. "I owe you many thanks, Monsieur de Nogent, for saving the life of one most dear to me. I must write to Annette, and let her know who was her deliverer; for, at the time, she was ignorant of your name."

"I dared not give it," replied Ernest de Nogent, "for I was at that time absent from my regiment without leave, living in close concealment in my father's house, and only venturing out through the woods to meet the person who conveyed my letters to and from Paris; for I had taken care to interest Monsieur de Choiseul in my cause, by representing to him that nothing but the state of my father's health had induced me to commit, what was, in truth, a breach of duty."

"You said your acquaintance with Annette commenced," said the count, returning to the point which most interested his mind: "Have you, then, seen her since?"

"Oh, yes!" replied Ernest de Nogent: "I saw her at my father's house on the very day I set off to rejoin the army. She then ascertained who I was; and I suppose some accidental circumstance must have prevented her from telling the facts to you."

The count paused and meditated for a minute, but the cloud gradually left his brow. "Yes," he said, thoughtfully; "yes, there were circumstances that prevented her from explaining the facts; and, I am sorry to say, those very circumstances are connected with her illness. You must, then, have left Castel Nogent on the same day that I quitted Castelneau; and on that very day, in returning from her visit to your father, her horse took fright at a flash of lightning, while she was suffering him to drink in the stream, and she was, consequently, thrown, and considerably injured by the fall. I did not leave her, however, till the surgeons assured me there was no danger; and I have since heard from her, giving me the assurance that she was even better than when I left her."

"I am happy, most happy, to hear it," replied Ernest de Nogent; and then fell into a fit of thought, from which he did not rouse himself till he found the eyes of all present fixed somewhat intently upon him. He cast it off as soon as he perceived that such was the case, and made an effort to talk cheerfully on other subjects, in which he succeeded. But what the Count de Castelneau had observed, had cast him, in turn, into a reverie; and, notwithstanding all his natural command over himself, he could not resist the strong impression upon him, but remained till dinner was announced, somewhat silent and gloomy, occupied by one of those internal struggles which absorb all the energies of the mind, and leave the material organs to act merely as parts of a machine, moved by the great spring of habit.

By the time, however, that the meal was served, and he had sat down to table, he had again conquered: he had successfully repelled the assault of the evil spirit upon his heart, and driven him back, though the defences of the place might be injured by the siege that it had undergone. In such a warfare, men would do well

to remember that the enemy is one who never altogether raises that siege, but proceeds day after day, while the fortress crumbles down before him, unless some glorious and mighty help is sought and obtained to succour the distressed garrison.

At length, then, the Count de Castelneau resumed all his cheerfulness, spoke kindly and warmly to Ernest de Nogent, and could not help acknowledging to himself, that in him there were evident many excellent qualities of which the Baron de Cajare had shown no sign. The Duke of Choiseul, on his part, had already remarked several things in the demeanour, both of the Count de Castelneau and of Ernest de Nogent, which excited his curiosity; and he determined to unravel the mystery, if mystery there were; but the task of prying into the heart of the Count de Castelneau was no slight one; and, notwithstanding all his penetration, Choiseul remained at fault.

The heart of Ernest de Nogent, however, was much more easily to be studied: and as the duke led the conversation back to the subject of Mademoiselle de St. Morin, and made the young officer give the whole particulars of the adventure with the wolf, the changes of Ernest's countenance might have shown to eyes less penetrating than those which looked upon him, that there was a deeper interest in his bosom towards her whom he had saved than could arise from the incident itself, or from the effect of a mere passing acquaintance.

"Well, now, Ernest," said the duke, after the conversation had gone on for some time, "you shall let us know what *you* think of Mademoiselle de St. Morin. From something which Monsieur de Castelneau said a minute or two ago, I am inclined to believe that she is extremely beautiful. Is it not so, Monsieur de Castelneau?"

"I really do not know," replied the count, "from what part of my discourse your lordship's keen wit has derived intimation of a fact which I am not at all inclined to deny. As far as my poor judgment goes, Annette is, indeed, most beautiful. But, of course, I am not so good a judge as young men."

"The deduction was very easy, Monsieur de Castelneau," replied the duke, who rather prided himself upon the rapidity of his calculations. "What you said regarding Monsieur le Baron de Cajare, led me at once to conclude that the young lady was very beautiful. You would not have suspected him of taking such rash measures unless you suspected him of being very much in love; and he is not a man to be in love with anything less than transcendent beauty."

The count smiled, but did not reply; and the duke went on to press his wife's nephew upon the subject, saying: "But come, Ernest, you have not answered my question. What is your opinion of the young lady's beauty?"

"I can but say that she is very beautiful," replied Ernest de Nogent; "indeed, the most beautiful being that I ever beheld; for her beauty is not in her features alone, but in the expression, which is ever changing, but ever perfect."

"Hyperbole, hyperbole! my dear Ernest," cried the Duchess of Choiseul. "How can the expression be always changing, and yet always perfect? If it is perfect at one moment, any change from that must be less perfect."

"Oh, my dear aunt!" replied the young officer, "the Abbe Barthelemi has spoilt you by teaching you metaphysics. Give me that ring off your finger."

"A modest request, indeed," said the duchess; but taking off the ring at the same time, and holding it out to her nephew.

"Look at this diamond," said Ernest de Nogent, with a smile: "what colour does it reflect when I turn it thus?"

"Green," replied the duchess.

"And when I turn it thus?" demanded her nephew.

"Bright yellow," she replied.

"And thus?" he continued.

"Pure rose colour," was the answer.

"And each as bright, as the other, my dear aunt, are they not?" continued Ernest de Nogent, giving her back the ring; "and such is the expression of Mademoiselle de St. Morin's countenance, ever varying, but always perfectly bright and beautiful."

"You deserve the ring for your illustration," replied the duchess, rolling it across the table to him. "If the young lady's heart be as much a diamond as you represent her person to be, she must, indeed, be worthy of the noblest race in France."

Monsieur de Castelneau would fain have mused, but he struggled with himself, and overcame the temptation. Nay more, he took part again in the conversation regarding Annette, assured the Duchess of Choiseul that her person afforded but a faint image of her heart and mind; and turning to the duke, he added, "Just as it seems to me, my lord, that a picture, however masterly, is but an imperfect image of what we see in nature."

The duke smiled at this return to what they had been speaking of before, and replied, "You are such an admirer of the beauties of nature, Monsieur de Castelneau, that, ere you return to Paris, I must take you through our park here in the direction of Versailles, where we have even more beauty than towards Arpajon."

The conversation now deviated into other channels, and fell upon subjects of general interest till dinner was concluded. After a short pause in the saloon of the duchess, the duke proposed to Monsieur de Castelneau that they should walk forth into the park. Madame de Choiseul, however, remained at home; and Ernest de Nogent, though he would willingly have accompanied the Count de Castelneau, whose good opinion he was very desirous of cultivating, determined to stay with his aunt, not knowing what sort of communication the minister might be desirous of holding with his guest. The subjects started, however, were altogether general, and referred principally to matters of art and taste. Before they returned, indeed, the curious circumstance of Monsieur de Castelneau meeting his young neighbour Ernest de Nogent there, led the Duke of Choiseul on to speak of the young officer's character and family. Of Ernest himself he gave an account which, from the lips of the duke, was commendation indeed.

"We love him scarcely less than if he were our own son," he said; "but I have made it a point not to press any members of my own family into public employments. Fortune he has little of, none, poor fellow, and must make his way with his sword; for, alas! so little flows into my coffers for my services to the State,

and so much flows out of them to supply some of the necessities of the State," that though we may regret that we have no children of our own, it is probably far better that such is the case."

"I did not know, my lord," replied the count, "that the Duchess of Choiseul had a sister, and still less did I know that her sister had married Monsieur de Nogent. I always understood that that gentleman had married a Mademoiselle de Lisle, while the duchess I remember well as the heiress of the noble house of Du Châtel."

"True, true," replied the duke, "Madame de Nogent was her half-sister—the same mother but another father. Poor Marie de Lisle had little or no fortune of her own, and she married a man who had little fortune either. We minded not that, however, for his blood is as noble as any in France, and though a *mésalliance* is what, of course, we could not have tolerated for a moment, we cared not for the accidental circumstances of fortune: indeed, my sweet lady herself gave part of her own to increase that of her sister."

"Then notwithstanding all the fine new notions of the present day," said the count, "you still hold, my lord duke, that there is something in noble blood which should prevent it from allying itself with that of an inferior class."

"I trust, sir," replied the Duke of Choiseul, raising his head, "that there is no gentleman of really pure blood in France that can think otherwise. These new notions that you speak of are but set abroad by men who would fain rise into our stations by any means; and we should hold this barrier but the more firmly against them."

The count mused: the very same prejudices of birth which had been expressed by the Duke of Choiseul, he had himself combated a thousand times; but there was something in his heart which would not, on the present occasion, let him say one word in opposition to the duke's arguments. The minister remarked his silence, and asked, "Do you not think so, Monsieur de Castelneau?"

"Perhaps I am not so strongly wedded to such opinions as you are," replied the count, with an evasion which he did not forgive himself for, even while he used it; "but so far I do think with you fully, that, though no means should be employed to prevent courage, genius, and exertion from raising a man to the very highest point in society, yet we should use all means to prevent anything but virtue and talents from producing that result."

The Duke of Choiseul was not quite satisfied with this reply, but as it was a matter of no consequence, and they were now taking their way homeward, he turned the conversation to the object which had brought the Count de Castelneau thither, and said, "Perhaps it may be better for you to see the king at once, when I have made my report to his majesty in regard to our interview of this morning. I shall go over to-morrow to Versailles about eleven; by the hour of noon my private audience will be at an end, and I will

This is known to have been absolutely the fact; the Duke of Choiseul having more than once supplied, from his own fortune, deficiencies in revenue, which other ministers might have taken less generous means to fill up:

then introduce you to his majesty's presence, as well as Ernest, who has to make his peace, you hear. May I ask you to be kind enough to bring him down with you in your carriage to Versailles; for he must go back to Paris to-night, as it will be as well that he should not stop here till he is reinstated in the royal favour."

"I shall be most happy, my lord," replied the count. "Will not Monsieur de Nogent return in my carriage to Paris?"

"He came on horseback," replied the duke; "but, doubtless, he will prefer your society to a solitary ride."

The proposal was accordingly made: Ernest de Nogent accepted the offer gladly; and as the carriage proceeded towards Paris, much conversation took place between him and his companion. It was of a pleasant and tranquil kind. Without knowing why, Ernest kept off the subject of Annette; and the Count de Castelleau felt when he parted from him, that, under most circumstances, he could have made that man his friend.

CHAPTER XXI.

THAT splendid monstrosity, the palace of Versailles, was certainly not in the same state of magnificence in which it had been placed by the vain ostentation of Louis XIV. but still it displayed a degree of luxury and extravagance which formed a painful contrast with the situation of a suffering and indigent population. There was also, in the aspect of the people who thronged its saloons and galleries, an air of dissolute frivolity, of careless, mocking superciliousness, which generally marks a court or country on the eve of its downfall. When the great of a nation have learned to feel a contempt for all those things that are in themselves good and great, the nation is soon taught to feel a contempt for the great; and, as a part of the nation, the Count de Castelleau felt no slight portion of scorn for all that surrounded him, as accompanied by Ernest de Nogent, he walked through the crowded halls of the palace, towards the audience which had been promised him by the Duke of Choiseul. He, perhaps, more than any one else, felt and condemned the persons and the scene around him. His eye was fresh from purer things, his mind had been sanctified by a commerce with virtue, truth, and nature, and all the vice, and the idle levity, and the ostentatious nothingness which appeared before his sight, struck him as something new and horrible, though he had witnessed the same scene many a time before.

The conversation of Ernest de Nogent had not tended to smooth the way for the impression made by Versailles. There was a freshness about the young nobleman's mind—a truth, an eagerness, a candour—which harmonized well with the bright simplicity of God's own creations, but were a living reproach to the corrupted manners of that court. Without the slightest idea that the count could entertain towards him any but the most kindly feelings, knowing of no objections which could be raised against his pretensions to Annette, except the comparative poverty of his house, he had striven frankly and freely to please her guardian during their

short intercourse, and, in spite of very repugnant feelings in the breast of the count, had succeeded.

He was well known to many members of the court, but none knew or recognised the Count de Castelnau; and, as they moved on through those spacious halls, many a gay and glittering officer stopped Ernest de Nogent, spoke a word or two with him on his own account, and then, in a whisper, inquired who was his graver friend. There was something in the air of the count, however, in his calm, firm step, his thoughtful but self-possessed demeanour, the slight and somewhat scornful smile that curled his lip, and his stern, irrepressible eye, which produced a feeling of reverence in men who had reverence for very few things on earth, and made them give way before him when they might have jostled a man of superior station.

At length, as the count and his companion approached the door which communicated with the king's apartments, without perceiving any sign of its having been opened that day, Ernest de Nogent asked one of the *garde du corps* if any one had been yet admitted.

"Oh, no!" replied the officer, "the king has not come from the *Parc au Cerfs*. He has not a fresh importation from Provence, and we may be kept these two hours."

Ernest de Nogent gave a look of disgust, and turned towards the Count de Castelnau, as if to interpret what had been said, but the count bowed his head, and replied to the look—"I heard, my young friend, and understand; such turpitudes, unhappily, fly far."

The anticipation of the officer of the *garde du corps* did not prove exactly correct. For about half an hour longer the count and Ernest de Nogent were detained, hearing around them more licentious ribaldry, perhaps, than ever was spoken in any other court in Europe. Witty and brilliant it certainly was, as well as scandalous, malicious, and gross; but that wit must always be of a somewhat feeble and debilitated kind, which is obliged to have recourse to calumny and licentiousness to support it under either arm.

At length the door opened, and the Duke of Choiseul himself came forth, brilliantly habited in the costume of the times, and bearing a portfolio under his arm. He spoke a few words with his usual quickness and precision to several persons who stood round the door, and who each pressed for a word with the minister. But he pushed his way forward all the time, till his eyes fell upon the Count de Castelnau and Ernest de Nogent. The moment he saw them, he thrust another gentleman out of the way with very little ceremony, and said, in a quick tone, as he beckoned them up, "Come with me, come with me; the king is waiting for you."

"Both," he added, seeing Ernest linger behind; "both of you." They followed in silence; and when they had passed through the door into an ante-room, the duke whispered, "I need not tell you to be cautious. The king is in no very placable mood to day. Ernest, no rashness—remember how you once offended when you were page of honour, by a thoughtless reply."

"I will be careful," replied the young officer, "for I must not do discredit to anything you may have said in my favour."

Passing through another room, the duke led his companions to the door of the king's cabinet, where a page stood to guard against

intrusion. The duke entered first; and then returning, brought the two gentlemen into the royal presence, saying "Monsieur de Castelneau, sire!—and my nephew, Ernest de Nogent; whom you were good enough to say you would see together."

The only object worthy of remark in the cabinet when the count entered, was a gentleman dressed in black, who was seated at the opposite side of the chamber, with a table on his right hand, covered with writing materials, and his foot raised upon a stool. He was by no means a prepossessing person in appearance. Though his features, in themselves, were fine, there was a lack of feeling in his countenance—a want of soul in the whole expression, that was very repulsive. There was nothing either inquiring, or gracious, or menacing in the face: all was cold—and yet it was cold without dullness. You could not suppose, in looking on those features, that mind was wanting; it was merely an appearance of *want of interest* in the objects before him, tinged with contempt; but that slight scornful turn of the lip was all that chequered the look of utter apathy with which he regarded the count and his companion.

The complexion of the king (for he it was) seemed to have once been delicate and womanish; but the skin was now wrinkled with years, the cheeks had fallen in, and a little rouge had evidently been added where the colour had abandoned the cheek, rendering the monarch anything but more pleasing in appearance. His lips were thin and pale; and it was impossible to gaze on him without feeling an impression that debauchery more than age had shared in the decay which no art could hide.

The Count de Castelneau, both on account of his age and rank, advanced first on entering the room; but the king called the young officer forward, saying, "Here, Ernest; come hither! So you thought fit to quit your regiment without leave, young man."

"Sire," replied Ernest de Nogent, advancing, "I applied for leave, and only ventured upon the rash act which I did commit on account of my father's severe illness."

"You were very wrong, sir," replied the king. "There is no excuse for want of discipline."

"Most true, sire," answered the young nobleman; "I am without excuse, and came not to urge any; but merely to cast myself upon your majesty's clemency, trusting you will consider that sometimes our feelings overpower our reason, and that I hastened to my father's side when I heard he was at the point of death as wildly and inconsiderately as I might fly to the side of my king, did I hear he was in peril or in difficulty."

The monarch turned to the duke; and the count observed, that whenever he spoke to his minister, the king's countenance relaxed into a faint smile. "You say, duke, that he has received his reprimand?" he asked; and on the duke bowing his head in token of assent, he went on, "Well, sir, I have left the matter in the hands of the general, and therefore I shall add nothing to what he has thought fit to do, except a warning to be more careful in future. Now, Monsieur de Castelneau, what have you to say?"

"Very little, sire," replied the count, "except to wish your majesty good health and high prosperity."

The king turned to the Duke of Choiseul, and the Duke of Choi-

seul looked down, without replying. "Did you not tell me, my lord," said the king, "that the Count de Castelnau wished to speak with me?"

"Not precisely, sire," answered the duke. "You may recollect that some suspicions were excited."

"Oh yes! by the Baron de Cajare," replied the king; "I remember very well."

"Will, your majesty permit me to remind you," said the duke, "that it was by no direct accusation on the part of the baron; but by what he let fall regarding the retired way in which Monsieur de Castelnau lived, when he was speaking of the discontent that has manifested itself in Quercy and the Agenois."

"It continually happens, your majesty," said the Count de Castelnau, with a faint smile, "that when any one wishes to do us an injury, who is too cowardly to make a bold accusation, and too feeble to affect us by open efforts, he endeavours to degrade us in the opinion of those to whom we are most attached by insinuating what he dares not assert; and where he is very mean and very contemptible indeed, he couches his insinuations in such terms as to leave the minds of the persons who hear to draw the deduction that he is afraid to point out himself. Such has been the case, it would seem, with the Baron de Cajare. He said nothing against me; but told your majesty that I was living a solitary and unsocial life, far from the royal court and person, in the same breath that he spoke of seditions in the neighbouring districts, and other things that might well excite your indignation, leaving you to draw the inference that I had some share in these troubles. He forgot, however, to remind your majesty that I had been bred up for a profession which counsels retirement and seclusion; and that—though I never actually entered the church, and certainly did cast off my gown when I unexpectedly came into great wealth and high rank—I remained attached to the clerical profession as Abbe de Castelnau till I had passed the fortieth year of my age. He did not tell you, sire, as he might have told you, that these troubles were in a remote part of the province; that I neither had, nor could have anything to do with them; that I have never in my life taken any part in either a religious or a political dispute; that I have no communication with refractory parliaments; no dealings with Jesuits; no connexion with Jansenists. All this the Baron de Cajare might have told your majesty at the same time; and had he done so, he would have prevented your suspecting for a moment one of your most faithful subjects."

"You are eloquent, Monsieur de Castelnau," said the king, with the curl of his lip growing somewhat stronger; "pray, has the Baron de Cajare any cause of enmity towards you?"

The Duke of Choiseul hastened to interfere; for he knew that the king's mood at that moment was a very irritable and unsettled one.

"Monsieur de Castelnau has explained the whole to me, sire," he said: "there is no cause of enmity, indeed;—but it would appear that Monsieur de Cajare would fain have the count take up his abode in Paris, rather than remain at Castelnau."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the king, with more animation than usual; "how so! upon what account?"

"Why, it would seem, sire," replied the duke, thinking, perhaps, a little of Ernest de Nogent while he spoke, and forgetting the peculiar character and frightful licence of the person he addressed: "it would seem, sire, that Monsieur de Castelneau has a ward, a young lady of very extraordinary beauty; at least, if I may judge by Ernest's account. With her the Baron de Cajarc has fallen in love; and as he is as much in love with Paris as the lady—and, indeed, cannot absent himself long from the capital—he wished to make your majesty and me the tools of bringing the count and his fair ward to Paris."

A peculiar, unpleasant, simpering smile came upon the old king's face, as he asked, "Is she in Paris, then, Monsieur de Castelneau?"

"No sire," replied the count, "she is not; I left her behind."

The Duke of Choiseul perceived at once, from that smile, the evil that he had done without thinking it, and he hastened to the aid of Monsieur de Castelneau, saying, "Of course, sire, the count, at once suspecting the Baron de Cajarc, and understanding his motives, did not choose to gratify him."

"We must make him gratify the king," said Louis XV. with the same meaning and detestable look.

The Count de Castelneau answered boldly, "In all honourable things, sire, none shall be found more ready to gratify you. Dishonourable things," he added, neither regarding a frown on the face of Louis, nor a sign from the Duke of Choiseul, "my king knows himself and me, I am sure, too well to ask."

Louis's brow was as black as night, and his meagre hand grasped the side of his chair, while his foot beat the ground with a sharp, quick movement. It was wonderful, however, how far he could conquer himself, when his passions or his vices required an effort; and, after remaining in silence for a moment or two, he turned to Ernest de Nogent, asking, "Is she so very beautiful, then, Ernest?"

The young nobleman would willingly have belied poor Annetta's beauty, but he dared not tell a falsehood, and he replied, "She is indeed, sire, very beautiful."

A dead pause ensued; no one, of course, wishing to renew the conversation but the king, and he not knowing very well how to carry it on farther for his own particular views and purposes. At length he said, turning to the duke, "The baron is in the Bastile, I think, Monsieur de Choiseul?"

"He is sire," replied the duke, hoping to engage another of the king's passions, and make the one counteract the other; "his insolent disregard of your majesty's express commands, when you directed him to avoid all personal interference with my nephew Ernest; his going down into Quercy the very same day that he received notification of your wish to the contrary, taking with him, on his own authority, a guard, evidently for the purpose of disobeying your most strict orders—all these circumstances, sire, together with several others which I shall have to lay before your majesty ere long, when I have fully investigated them, made me instantly send down the deputy of the lieutenant-general to arrest this contumacious person, and lodge him in the Bastile. I examined him myself for an hour yesterday morning, and met with nothing but cool insolence both towards your majesty and myself."

The duke had spoken at some length, in order to draw off the king's attention; but Louis was not to be led away from the subject predominant at that moment in his mind; and he asked quietly, "Pray, Monsieur de Choiseul, how long do you think it may be before the case is complete against the Baron de Camille?"

The duke did not understand the king's object, and replied, "Perhaps not for six weeks or two months, sire; for there is a gambling piece of business, where all did not go quite fairly, it would seem, which must be inquired into. One of the party threw himself out of the window and was killed; but several of the officers who were present are now absent in Flanders and on the Rhine."

"Say three months—say three months, Monsieur de Choiseul," exclaimed Louis; "we must have his conduct thoroughly sifted. Better say three months."

"It may very likely be as long as that, sire," replied the duke, who was completely deceived, and thought that he had carried off the king's attention from Annette de St. Morin. "Probably to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion, we shall be that time, or more."

"Very well, then," said the king, turning to the count; "we shall command you, as you are particularly interested in this business, to remain in Paris for the space of those three months, presenting yourself weekly at our court, in order that we may communicate with you upon the subject when we think fit. You will also, if you take our advice, send for your household, and bring this young lady from time to time to Versailles. We give her the invitation."

He spoke with an air of dignity, and a contracted brow; and when he had done he bowed his head slightly, to intimate that the audience was at an end.

The count and Ernest de Nogent retired without reply; but the moment they had passed through the ante-chambers and entered the general reception rooms, the young officer turned eagerly to the count, demanding, in a low voice, but with an air of terrible anxiety and apprehension, "What do you intend to do?"

"To obey the king's commands," replied the count, calmly, "but not to take his advice."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Ernest de Nogent, eagerly. "Oh! Monsieur de Castelneau, be firm; I beseech you be firm."

"I will, my young friend," replied the count, grasping his hand; "I will—though from what I have heard you say. I should think that you would rather desire Mademoiselle de St. Morin's presence in Paris, if I understand right that your regiment is quartered in the neighbourhood."

"It is even now marching for Chateau Thierry," replied the young officer; "but believe me, Monsieur de Castelneau, I would rather never behold Mademoiselle de St. Morin again, than behold her in the contamination of this place. You know not, you cannot know, all the dark and disgraceful secrets of this very building. It was bad enough when I was here as page of honour, nearly nine years ago, but I understand it is infinitely worse now."

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth, when his name was called forth from the door of the king's apartments by one of the

attendants, and he was forced to go back to the presence of a monarch who was now labouring to blot out, by a course of tyranny and debauchery, the memory of all those fair promises which the early part of his reign had afforded.

The count promised to wait for his young companion; and remained standing alone, busying himself with his own thoughts, and heeding but little the various faces that flitted by him. In about ten minutes Ernest de Nogent rejoined him, with a cheek burning, and an eye fixed anxiously on the ground. "I have kept you," he said; "I have kept you, I am afraid; and I owe any one an apology for making them breathe this air longer than their own business requires. Let us go, Monsieur de Castelnau; let us go."

Walking rapidly through the rooms, the two gentlemen quitted the palace, and, after some little difficulty, found the count's carriage, which was soon rolling with them on the road towards Paris.

"You seem agitated, my young friend," said the count, as Ernest sat beside him in silence, pressing his clasped hands hard together.

"I am indignant as well as agitated, Monsieur de Castelnau," replied Ernest. "I will not offend your ear with that man's inquiries or discourse. I have marred my own fortunes for ever, I doubt not; but I care little for that, provided you remain firm, as you have quite the power to do."

"I give you my word of honour, my young friend," replied the count, "that were I to be kept here for ever, and my lodging were to be the Bastille to-morrow, on account of my determination, nothing should or shall induce me to send for Annette while the court is in its present degraded state. Sooner than she should come hither, I would send her into a foreign country; for there is no state of banishment equal in anguish to that of virtue amongst evil doers. Let that satisfy you for the present, and remember that better days may yet come."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE time had hung somewhat heavily upon the hands of Annette de St. Morin. She felt for some time the injury that she had received from her fall; she felt her loneliness, too, and the want of her daily conversation with her kind guardian.

Her mind seemed to lack food, and her heart also; for there used to be something pleasant and sweet in the knowledge that there was always some one that loved her near at hand, even when she was roaming about the country alone and the count was at Castelnau. Now there was no one near; and though the library of the chateau was well stocked with books, she did not visit it often. She knew that there were many books there which her guardian did not wish her to peruse; and perfectly confident in his kindness and his judgment, she not only did not feel the least desire to read those books, but was fearful lest she should open one of them by accident in seeking for something else. She therefore confined herself entirely to works which she had read before; and though a twice-read book may be less tedious than a twice-told tale, yet rare is the

writing which will afford the same interest and pleasure the second time as the first.

Days slipped by, however, and weeks. She received letter after letter from her guardian; and each was so far satisfactory that it told her he was well, that any charge against him had been repelled easily, and that he hoped speedily to return, though every one added that business might still detain him in Paris for a week or two longer. All this was true; but he told her not those facts which he might have found a difficulty in explaining to her pure and high mind. He told her not that the king had twice asked him whether she had yet come to Paris, and that he had been obliged to answer vaguely, that circumstances had prevented her from setting out. The last time he had made this reply, too, it had been received with a frown; and the count had then very plainly perceived that the time was approaching when he should be obliged to give a more definite explanation of his purposes regarding Annette. His letters, though calm and moderate in their expression, as was his conversation upon all ordinary occasions, breathed nothing but pleasure in the expectation of seeing her again at Castelneau. But still the days passed, and he appeared not; and the brown autumn coming on showed Annette the yellow side of the leaf as she wandered round the woods of the chateau in solitude of feeling and of thought. That solitude was, however, somewhat cheered from time to time by the visits which she occasionally paid to the old Baron de Nogent; and, after he had more fully recovered his health, by his visits to her in return.

Though he was still somewhat grave in his demeanour, the baron was with her more cheerful than with most people. There was something in the brightness of her youth and beauty which always produced a reflected sparkling from the minds of those around her; and the old nobleman spoke of many things whereof he would have spoken to none else of the hope, and the happiness, and the early days which had passed away; and dwelling thus upon the past, he forgot a little of the weariness of the present. The present, however, was not altogether forgotten; for he told her of his son's health, and that the make of the Baron de Cajarc had been frustrated; and he spoke also with enthusiasm of the Duke and Duchess of Choiseul, and of all the kindness which they had shown to Ernest.

That name sounded upon the ear of Annette with a thrilling interest which no other name could produce; and though she never herself led the way to the subject, yet it was sweet to her to sit and listen as the baron spoke of his son. She did not venture, indeed, to mingle much with the conversation when it took that turn; there was something in her heart which made her afraid of what her tongue might say; and she even pronounced the name, when it was necessary, with a degree of timidity which alarmed her for her own feelings, and made her fear that others might discover them, and suppose them to be deeper and stronger than they really were. It may be a question, however, and a difficult one to answer, whether Annette did herself know what was the depth and strength of these feelings. Another question might be, whether the baron did at all discover what their nature was.

Annette often asked herself whether Ernest had told his father the words which he had spoken to her on their last interview; for she frequently remarked in the baron's eyes, when he spoke to her, a look of interest and tenderness which she could account for in no other way than by supposing that he knew the feelings of his son, and felt affection for her whom that son loved. Then, again, she would ask herself, did Ernest really love her? and the timidity of her young heart would call up like spectres all the tales that she had heard of men's fickleness and inconstancy, and of the cruel trifling with which they will sometimes crush a woman's heart as a child does a butterfly. But, in her own innocence and truth, though she had heard of such things, though she believed that perhaps they might occasionally occur, she could not and would not apply the lesson individually: she could not and would not believe that Ernest de Nogent would so act.

She rested then in hope; and one day, having wandered forth upon her accustomed walk, to muse and ponder on all the many things, some sweet, some touched with sadness, but not exactly bitter, that were busy with her imagination at this time, she went on farther than she had been lately accustomed to, and approached the cross and the fountain, which she had not visited on foot since her adventure with the wolf. Fate seemed to guide her thither strangely as to the scene of important events; for although what I am about to relate may seem but a trifle, it marked an epoch in the life of Annette de St. Morin.

She had scarcely reached the fountain, and was gazing in the cool refreshing mirror that it afforded, when she saw the good old Baron de Nogent riding down on horseback toward her. He was unattended; and as soon as he saw her he dismounted and approached, throwing the bridle of his horse over his arm.

"I was just coming to visit you, my dear young lady," he said. "I have not seen you for a week, and, I know not why or how, an impression came upon my mind last night that you were either ill, or that some accident had happened to you. It is ridiculous to yield to such superstitious feelings, I confess; but I could not resist the inclination I felt to inquire after you this morning myself.

Annette smiled and thanked him, and left her fair hand in his, as he held it and gazed in her face, like a father looking at his child; and after she had assured him that she was well and happy, he asked her if she had lately heard from Paris.

She replied in the affirmative, saying, that her guardian had written, only the day before, a long and interesting letter, telling her, that in all probability he should soon return to Castelnau.

Even as they were speaking, one of the servants from the chateau was seen coming up with great speed, carrying a small packet in his hand. As soon as he could recover breath, he told her that a courier had just arrived from Paris, after travelling night and day. He had brought her that letter, the man said, from the count, and was ordered to deliver it without a moment's delay, as it was of very great importance.

Annette's first question was, "Is he well?" and even while she spoke, she opened the letter with a trembling hand, fearing to find some evil tidings.

"The courier said, mademoiselle," replied the servant, "that the count was quite well, and that nothing had happened amiss."

Annette read the letter eagerly, and then asked, in a thoughtful tone, "Who was it brought this letter?"

"I don't know his name, I am sure," replied the servant: "he was none of our own people, but some one whom my lord has hired in Paris, it seems."

Again Annette mused; and the good baron, seeing that she was embarrassed, and apparently not well pleased, inquired, "Is there anything that I can do to assist you, my dear child? Can I give you advice or help? for something seems to surprise and embarrass you."

"This letter does so, very much," cried Annette, still holding it in her hand. "Go back, good Jerome, and tell the courier I am about to return home directly. Pray, come with me, Monsieur de Nogent, and I will consult with you as I go."

The baron willingly agreed; and giving his horse to the servant to ride back to the castle, he drew Annette's arm through his, and walked slowly on with her. As soon as the man was out of hearing, she gave the letter into the hands of Monsieur de Nogent, saying, "It is very strange that my guardian should have written yesterday so very differently in every respect; that yesterday he should tell me he would return to Castelnau in a few days, whereas, now, he bids me come to Paris immediately."

"It certainly is strange," replied the baron; "but there may be many causes for it, my dear young lady, of which we can tell nothing. There is only one thing I would remark, which is, that the style of the letter is not altogether like the style in which Monsieur de Castelnau speaks. You must know better than I do, however. Are you sure that it is his own hand?"

"Oh, yes! quite sure," replied Annette: "there can be no doubt of that. The word Annette, indeed, is not exactly as he usually writes it, but it is certainly his handwriting, I think. Yet I cannot help looking upon it as strange, and fearing that he must be in prison, or ill, or distressed in mind; for there is a sort of restraint, as you observe, in the style, which is not at all usual with him."

"We will speak with this courier," said the Baron de Nogent, "and perhaps may learn more from him; but I do remark strongly the same restraint and forced style that you speak of. The letter is so short, too: it is more like the order of the day from a military commander, than from a guardian to his adopted child, whom he loves as well, I am sure, as if she were his own. There is something strange about the business that I do not understand; but our only means of ascertaining the truth, is, by inquiring all the particulars from this courier."

With such conversation they proceeded on their way till they reached the chateau of Castelnau. In passing through the lower hall, they found a man covered with dust, seated at a small table in the corner; for the great table at which the servants and retainers generally dined, had been removed. He was eating voraciously, and was a tall, stout, merry-looking personage, with one eye blind, and closed up. He was well dressed, however, as a courier, with his close-fitting blue jacket, covered with gold lace, his large, heavy riding-boots, weighing some twenty or thirty pounds,

still upon his legs, his hat, with a flat band of feathers, thrown down upon the ground beside him, and his strong *couteau de chasse*, or short hunting sword, in the buff belt over his shoulder.

The baron paused, eyeing him for a moment, and then asked, "Are you the courier who brought a letter to Mademoiselle de St. Morin not long ago?"

The man nodded his head, without rising or ceasing his meal, saying, "I am, sir, the Count of Castelneau's courier, and mademoiselle's very humble servant."

"Then be so good," said the baron, somewhat sternly, for he did not like the man's tone; "then be so good as to follow us to the saloon directly. Mademoiselle has a question or two to ask you, my good friend."

"In a moment, in a moment, sir," replied the courier, in the easy, off-hand tone he had before used, at the same time swallowing two more enormous mouthfuls, and pouring out one half of a bottle of good Cahors wine into the horn-cup that stood by his side. "Sir, your good health; mademoiselle, your good health;" and setting down the cup upon the table, after having drained it of its contents, he rose and followed the baron and Annette to the saloon in which she usually sat.

As soon as they were there, the baron fixed his eyes upon the courier, with a frown, saying, with marked emphasis, "You seem to be a very saucy personage."

"I am sir," replied the man, coolly; "never was a truer word spoken."

"I pray do you know," said the baron, "the way in which we treat saucy companions in Quercy?"

"No, indeed, sir," replied the courier; "may I ask how?"

"We tie them by the leg," said the baron, "and give them three dips head foremost in the Dordogne. Its waters are considered a sovereign cure for cool impudence; and if the Dordogne can't be met with, the Lot will do, or any pond in the province. Stay, stay; where are you going?"

"To get to my horse's back as fast as possible," replied the man, still moving toward the door; "for if I remain here, I shall be drowned in three days."

"Stop!" said the baron, in a tone of authority; "if you do not, I will have you stopped in a way that you may not like. We do not suffer such gentry to go out of the province without curing them: but be so good as to answer this young lady and myself a few questions with plain and simple truth, and in civil language, and you may escape such ablutions."

"Very well, sir, very well," said the man, in a humble tone; "I will do as you command, if I can; but habit is a terrible thing—habit is a terrible thing; and habit and nature have been the ruin of me."

"Pray, sir, is this letter the count's writing?" demanded the baron, pointing with his finger to the letter.

"As I hope to escape the Dordogne," replied the man, "I cannot tell. I neither taught him to write, nor saw him write it."

"But who gave it to you?—that is the question," continued the baron.

"A gentleman calling himself the Count de Castelnau," replied the courier, "and occupying the great hotel at the corner of the Rue St. Jacques."

The baron looked at Annette, and Annette at the baron, for that was certainly the house which the count had occupied ever since his arrival in the capital.

"But tell me," said the sweet voice of Annette, "of what complexion and appearance was the gentleman who gave you the letter, and called himself, as you say, the Count de Castelnau?"

"He is a tall, good-looking person, mademoiselle," replied the courier; "not quite so long and so lean as monsieur here, but somewhat paler in the face, with a bluish sort of beard, like the Turkish gentleman they talk about, and as grave and quiet as the same gentleman after he had cut off his last wife's head."

The description, though somewhat caricatured, was not to be mistaken, and the baron went on: "How long have you been in his service?"

"At the present moment," replied the man, "I have been in his service just four days and five hours; that is to say, five hours before I set out from Paris, and four days upon the journey."

"In fact, no time at all," said the baron; "but merely hired to bring the letter down to this place."

"Something like it, but not quite," answered the man: "the count did want a courier, and send for the first he could find; but he hired me to bring the letter, and to go back with the young lady, after which I am to be established courier in ordinary."

Neither the baron nor Annette had any means of judging whether the man's story was or was not true; and, moreover, when they came to ask themselves what reasonable cause there existed either for doubting the truth of the courier's tale, or for suspecting the letter not to be genuine, they found it difficult to assign any; and both were forced to admit that, the style being slightly constrained, was by no means sufficient to warrant the supposition that the count had not written that epistle. These thoughts were passing in the minds of both at the same moment; and the only farther questions which were put to the man were, "When did you quit Paris?—and what is your name, my good friend?"

"On Monday; and my name is Pierre Jean," replied the man, adding nothing farther.

"That is your Christian name," said the baron; "what is your surname?"

"Pierre Jean," replied the man; "my only name is Pierre Jean; that is the name my godfathers and godmothers gave me at my baptism: and I should be sorry to throw it off because it is a little worn out about the knees. Pierre Jean is the name I have been known by all my life, and the only name I answer to; nor do I see any reason why a man who has never in life had more than two shirts, should go about the world with the ostentatious frippery of three names upon his back."

"But what was your father's name?" demanded the baron, after thinking for a moment.

"Lord bless you, sir!" replied the man, "I never had a father; am a great deal too poor to indulge in the luxury of ancestors. M

mother's name I have forgotten, though she lived till I was some six years old; but as to a father, Heaven defend me! I never had such a thing that I know of; if I had, I might have been burdened with an inheritance, and brothers and sisters, and all sorts of things of that kind."

The baron smiled; for there was a droilery about the man's very impudence which was difficult to be resisted; and, after asking Annette whether she had any more questions to put, he told the courier that he might retire and finish his meal. In the course of a consultation with his young friend, which followed, the baron compared some of the count's former letters with the one which had been received that day, and this comparison left no doubt upon their minds that the letter was perfectly genuine.

"Whatsoever may be my father's motive," said Annette, "now that I am satisfied it is from him, I must of course set off directly; though I have a feeling of dread in regard to Paris: a dislike to visit that great, wide, heartless place, which I cannot overcome."

"Sooner or later," replied the old nobleman, "you would have to visit it beyond all doubt; and, perhaps, as well now as at any other time, when wisely guided and strongly protected, you have nothing to fear from its arts or its dangers. To one person, at least," added the baron, "your visit will give unfeigned pleasure: you know that Ernest is now in the immediate neighbourhood of the capital."

The blood flew warmly into Annette's face, and she murmured something not very distinct about the pleasure she should have in meeting him again; and then added, that she had better send down to Figearc for horses.

"It is impossible, my dear child," said the baron, "that you can go to-night; recollect that it is now past four o'clock. Before you could send, and your messenger return, it would be much too late to set out, even if you could make the preparations necessary for your journey. Besides, you must not go alone. Who do you take with you?"

"Oh! I will take good Donnine," replied Annette, "and old Jerome, and another man with the carriage. Besides, there is this courier, you know."

The baron mused for a moment or two with a thoughtful and somewhat melancholy countenance; but in the end he said, with a sigh, "I am afraid it must be so. I would fain go with you, my dear young lady, but there are two or three circumstances which would render it wrong for me to do so. There is no danger of any kind, I believe, to be anticipated, and perhaps I may be enabled to do as much for you here as I could on the road."

Some more conversation of the same kind took place; and the exact course which Annette was to pursue from town to town was settled between her and the baron, whose experience in such matters was, of course, much greater than her own. This having been done, and a messenger despatched to Figearc to order horses for the ensuing day, the baron took leave of her and returned to Castel Nogent; and Annette, after having made every preparation for her departure at a very early hour on the following morning, retired to seek rest, but for some time was not successful in finding it. She

was somewhat agitated, if not apprehensive: it was the first time that she had ever been called upon to act and direct, on any great occasion, and, in short, to exercise, without guidance or support, all those powers of mind which are necessary to every one, even in the common affairs of life. All this moved her considerably, and when she fell asleep at length, her sleep was disturbed by dreams of the wildest and the most varied kind. Once or twice, however, through those dreams, the form of Ernest de Nogent appeared before her, and his voice sounded in her ear; and thus, after a time, the pleasanter images predominated, and she awoke with a smile upon her countenance.

CHAPTER XXIII.

As every one must know who has tried it, and as every person who may happen to be as inexperienced as Annette will be more especially convinced of whenever they do try it, the appointment of a particular hour for departure is not the slightest guarantee whatsoever that the departure will take place for one or two hours afterwards. Of this fact, poor Annette soon became sensible. She had particularly expressed a wish that everything should be ready at a stated time; but nothing, of course, was ready at the time stated. Her own clothes took a considerable time to pack in the large heavy carriages of those days; the clothes of Douine took longer still; and the clothes of Annette's maid took longer than all.

The only person who was prepared to mount and set out at a moment's notice was Pierre Jean, the two-shirted courier, who, to say the truth, was a braggart even in the matter of linen, having but one shirt, which was the one upon his back. Thus, not being very much encumbered with baggage, his external preparations were easily made, and the chateau being ever well supplied, he employed the time, which others were spending upon the packing of the carriage, in making internal preparations for the journey, which went on for a considerable length of time.

Before all was ready for Annette's departure, the good old Baron de Nogent himself appeared. He was accompanied by a servant on horseback, to whom he gave a letter, with orders to carry it to Figeac, in order to go by the ordinary post; but Pierre Jean was at his elbow while giving these directions, and, forgetting the lessons of the preceding evening, the courier instantly interfered, offering to carry the letter to Paris himself, and saying, "It will go more safely, depend upon it: the post is very doubtful now-a-days."

"I would always rather trust an accredited scoundrel, sir, than an irresponsible one," said the baron; "and, judging from the time you took to come hither, my letter, which I wish to reach Paris immediately, would take too long in your hands to answer my purpose."

"I came wonderfully fast, sir," said the man, in his usual cool, impudent tone. "I was detained on the road, it is true, but that was by a rascally wrong-headed beast of a horse, which threw me eleven times in nine miles. Every time I lighted upon my head,

and consequently the argument which we held with each other, the question, the reply, and the rejoinder, took up a considerable length of time."

The baron looked at him for a moment thoughtfully, and then said, "You have other business to attend to than carrying letters, let me remind you; and it will be well for you to recollect, that upon your conduct during the journey with Mademoiselle de St. Morin will depend whether you are amply rewarded or very severely punished. The Count de Castelneau, as perhaps you know, is not a man to leave you an ear upon your head if any evil betide his ward by the way."

"Sir," replied the courier, making him a low bow, and winking his valuable eye, "I will take care of my ears: I will obey the orders I receive to a tittle, and I will have regard to all due cautions and proper counsels."

The baron then left him, with a few words more of warning, and proceeded to seek Annette, who, in about half an hour, entered the carriage, and bade her good old friend adieu, while the wheels rolled her away from the calm and pleasant scenes of Castelneau, where she had spent so many a happy day.

It was a sweet, yellow, autumnal morning; and the low sun was casting long shadows from the towers and walls of the chateau, and from the magnificent old trees that appeared round about it, some of which—the yews, for instance, that stood in the western angle—were supposed to be coeval with itself. Annette looked forth from the window of the carriage, and she thought that there seemed, in the solemn and tranquil aspect of the place, in the cool morning light sleeping undisturbed on the green slopes and rounded forest tops, in those long shadows moving as if they moved not, so slowly and deliberately as the sun went on his way, that no eye could detect the change as they advanced; there seemed in it all, she thought, a warning, an admonition to avoid the false glare and glitter, the hurrying gaiety, the fluttering lightness of the scenes in which she was about to mingle; to love still what she had loved well and holily from infancy to womanhood, and to let her heart dwell with the calmer, higher, grander things of earth, till her spirit, ready and prepared, should take wing for the mighty realization of all bright hopes in heaven. To her mind all the things around her seemed to bid her farewell, calling upon her to return unchanged, as if it were the solemn voice of maternal love that spoke. There was something awful and sublime in the parting from those sweet scenes of her early youth, and she gazed with affectionate tenderness till the last pinnacle of the castle sunk behind the trees, and then, drawing back her head, she covered her eyes with her handkerchief, and wept.

Donnine, on her part, did not understand such emotion at all; for she could conceive nothing but joy and satisfaction to any one in going to rejoin her beloved master, even were it at the very greatest sacrifice. She liked Castelneau well enough as a residence, but she did sometimes think it rather dull; she did sometimes regret the gay city in which many of her early days had been passed; and, if the truth must be told, she was more glad to join the count there than she would have been anywhere else, for-

getting that the light-heartedness of youth, which had seasoned the pleasures of the capital, had now passed away from her, and might have left them tasteless. She tried to comfort her young lady, however, to the best of her power; but, alas! when those who strive to console us under grief, or soothe us in agitation, are incapable of comprehending the very causes of our emotion, how tediously their words fall upon the ear! what a grinning mockery is consolation without sympathy!

"Hush, Donnine, hush!" said Annette, gently. "You do not understand, my good Donnine. I am not grieved; only a little agitated, at thus having to go, for the first time, into the world alone."

"Oh, you are frightened!" cried Donnine. "Is that it, my dear lady? Take courage, take courage! The world is not so bad a place as people call it. I warrant you, you will not find a gay cavalier in all Paris who would not be right glad to pull off his hat to you, and cast himself at your feet."

"I think you know Paris well, Donnine," replied Annette, with a faint smile, knowing that, as long as she appeared melancholy, the good old lady would not cease to importune her.

"Know Paris well!" exclaimed Donnine. "Indeed do I! Many a pleasant hour have I spent there. Why, did I not bring you from Paris, myself, *mademoiselle*, when you were an infant? If any one should know Paris, I should, I think; for there never passed a spring, during thirty years, that I did not spend four months in Paris. Alack! that I should not have seen it for well nigh twenty years: no, not twenty, nineteen years come next April. It is a long time to be out of Paris;" and once having set out upon such an interesting subject, she went on without the assistance of an answer, till Annette became more tranquil.

When the carriage stopped for the night, the small and unimportant difficulties and embarrassments of giving orders and directions in regard to everything, for the first time in her life, occupied Annette's mind, and wiled away the slight shade of melancholy that still remained. She was one whose natural sweetness of disposition qualified her well to pass through all the minor obstacles that strew our path, with ease and happiness to herself and others. There was no such thing as irritation in her nature, and she smiled at many things which would have grieved a more fretful disposition. Perhaps this might be one of the causes why her conduct and demeanour won so much upon every body that surrounded her: so that the love and affection of all who knew her well followed her in all directions; and it was not possible, for even new acquaintances, to resist that peculiar charm which is always found in sweetness of temper and true kindness of heart.

Two or three times, during the course of the evening, the bold, and somewhat saucy courier, who had borne her the letter from Paris, presented himself, under various pretences, in the room where she was sitting, and the effect of her manner and tone, even upon him, was very evident. His countenance took a more respectful expression; he seemed to listen with pleasure to her voice; and when he quitted the room, it was remarked that he seemed in some degree more thoughtful than usual, falling once or twice into a deep reverie.

His companions of the road, however, observed that, from these meditations he always roused himself, rubbing his hands, and murmuring one particular exclamation, which was, "*Deux cens écus, et tout payé!*" Two hundred crowns and everything paid! Whatever was the course of argument of which this was the climax, the latter words seemed to him perfectly satisfactory and conclusive; and he resumed, forthwith, his gay and nonchalant impudence, breaking his jests upon everybody, and never returning a very civil or serious answer to any question that was asked him.

Early on the following morning, Annette was again upon her way from Limoges; and, passing on through the hilly country which lies between Limoges and Morterol, she paused there at a little inn to take some refreshment. When Annette had dined, and was just about to order fresh horses, her *soubrette* came in, and whispered in her ear, with a face of some mystery and alarm, that she had heard the new courier making manifold inquiries as to whether two or three persons, whom he had described, had passed by Morterol. Annette, however, was not naturally timid: the suspicious regarding this man, which she had at first entertained, she knew not well why, had by this time passed away, and she now only replied, "He is asking for some of his friends, I suppose, Mariette."

The girl seemed not so well satisfied as her mistress; but nevertheless the horses were ordered, and the carriage proceeded on its way. Annette herself could not now help remarking, that there was something extraordinary in Monsieur Pierre Jean's proceedings. He rode hither and thither, passed and repassed the carriage, and certainly seemed as if he were anxiously looking for some thing or person that did not appear. The young lady naturally became somewhat anxious; and, calling him to the side of the carriage, she asked what was the matter? He replied, that nothing was wrong, and that he was only looking for some friends of his who were going on their way to Bordeaux; but he thought they must have passed, he added, for they had quitted Paris at the same time as himself.

As every one must have experienced to their cost, who has followed the road from Limoges to Chateauroux, this part of the journey, though the country is varied and beautiful, is generally tedious, from the slowness with which the vehicle is forced to proceed, continually climbing or descending steep hills, which prevent anything like rapid progression. Such was the case with Annette; there was no inn nor town of any importance where she thought proper to sleep, between Morterol and Argenton; and as she was now a little apprehensive, from the somewhat strange conduct of the man who accompanied her, she saw the day wear away in this slow advance with some anxiety.

The sun was not far above the sky when she reached the old post-house of Le Fay, and the postmaster, who was also an inn-keeper, strove to persuade her to stay there. The aspect of the place, however, did not please her; and calculating rightly, that she would have time to reach Argenton before it was quite dark, she gave orders for proceeding quickly; and in about an hour and a half she came within sight of that picturesque little town, with

its rocks and vineyards, and the Creuse flowing on through the midst.

It must be confessed that it was a pleasant sight to Annette; but now that she had reached it in safety, she reproached herself for her fears, and was convinced that she had doubted the courier unjustly. It soon appeared that he had remarked her suspicions; for when the bustle of arrival was over, he presented himself, and said, "You thought my riding about very strange, mademoiselle, and so it was; but as I came down from Paris, I heard, about Le Fay and Morterol, that there was a gang of robbers on the road, and I was afraid of what might happen."

Annette answered sweetly and gently; and, after asking the man a few more questions, she dismissed him for the night. On leaving her presence, he again fell into one of those reveries which we have before remarked, but soon resumed his gaiety. The young lady, however, set out again from Argenton on the following day, with a mind more at rest; and everything passed calmly and quietly as she proceeded through the varied and beautiful country which lies between Argenton and Lottier, although the day was somewhat dull, and the sky gray and heavy. After passing Lottier, as the morning advanced, a fine drizzling rain began to fall, and the country changed its character altogether, and presented those wide wastes of moorish common-land which border for several leagues the great forest of Chateauroux. The absence of the sun rendered the south-easterly wind cold and chilly, and the prospect was dull and cheerless to the eye. A little further on, however, the road entered the forest of Chateauroux; and some fine scenery would have been presented among the glens, had it not been for the cold and dreary grayness of the atmosphere, which, though it did not prevent one from seeing up the long avenues of the forest, and down into the deep dells, gave every object a dark and cheerless aspect, and made the deer, which every here and there were seen standing at gaze or bounding swiftly across, seem like the ghosts of some of the former tenants of the wood slaughtered by the hounds in ages long ago.

As the carriage rolled slowly along through the sandy road, Annette thought she saw once or twice something like a human form at a distance; but as she knew that Chateauroux could not be far off, she did not entertain any apprehension, and calculated fully upon reaching Vierzon that night. At length, however, in a detached part of the wood which, though now entirely separate from the rest, and known by the name of the Bois de Nihérne, was evidently a portion of the great forest itself, just as the carriage had reached the bottom of a somewhat deep descent, it was suddenly surrounded by five or six men on horseback. Two placed themselves at the heads of the horses, several others watched the two men-servants who accompanied the vehicle, and another, riding up to the side, exclaimed, "*De par le roi!*"

Annette had heard those words before; but quite certain of never having in her life done, said, or thought anything which could call down upon her the royal indignation, she rapidly compared the appearance of the man who spoke with that of Pierre Morin, and such of his followers as she had seen from the windows

of Castel Nogent, and she concluded at once, that the official character which these men pretended to bear was falsely assumed.

"It is my purse you want, gentlemen," she said, calling all her courage to her aid—"If it is my purse you want, here it is at your service; but I beseech you to let me go on to Chateauroux as fast as possible; for—"

"You mistake, mademoiselle, you mistake," replied the man, in a rough tone: "we are no robbers; this is no robbery; it is an *enlèvement de police*. We have warrant for what we do. What made you think we were robbers?"

"Because you are dressed so differently from the police that I have seen," replied Annette; "but if you be really officers of police, you must be making a mistake. I have never done anything, or dreamt of doing anything, which should give cause of complaint."

"We are not making a mistake, mademoiselle," replied the man; "we know you quite well, and all about you. Your name is Mademoiselle de St. Morin, and you come from Castelneau. You are on your way to Paris; but we will take you by a shorter road than Chateauroux."

"Then I have been very much deceived," said Annette, looking up and down the road for the courier Pierre Jean, who was nowhere to be seen; "though I still do not understand, if you be of the police, what was the use of deceiving me from Castelneau hither."

"I have nothing to do with deceiving you," replied the man, in a sharp tone; "but all I have to say is, with me you must come; and you are to consider yourself a prisoner from this moment."

Annette felt an inclination to weep; but by a strong effort she kept down the tears, and merely bowed her head, saying, "Of course I must submit."

The man who had spoken to her then dismounted from his horse, gave the bridle to one of those who followed, and, after addressing a few words to the postillions, returned to the side of the carriage, opened the door, and took his seat opposite to Annette. The carriage then began to move forward, surrounded by the men on horseback, till it reached a place where the road divided into two, and a finger-post appeared, inscribed on the one side with the words, "To Chateauroux," while the other bore "To St. Vincent."

The latter road was by far the narrower and the worse of the two; but up it the postillions turned their horses' heads, and shortly afterwards the carriage stopped at a little hamlet, where four horses were waiting. They were ready harnessed, but after a very different fashion from the horses of the post-houses. As soon as the carriage paused, the beasts which had drawn Annette thither were taken off and the others were put on, and, in place of postillions, a coachman mounted the box. These proceedings, more than anything which had yet passed, convinced Annette that she was really in the hands of the police, for she knew that it was contrary to law for any one but a king's officer to change from the royal post on any account; after having commenced a journey in that particular manner.

She summoned courage, as soon as the vehicle again began to

move, to inquire of the person who sat opposite to her, what was the nature of the offence with which she was charged. The man smiled at her simplicity, and replied, "Are you not well aware that I know no more than you? You will hear all the particulars soon enough, my pretty lady. Do not be afraid that your offence will be concealed from you."

There was an unpleasant familiarity in the man's manner which displeased and frightened Mademoiselle de St. Morin; and that familiarity increased rather than diminished as they proceeded on their way, till, exerting the native dignity of her character, when he dared, on one occasion, to address her with impertinent levity, she gave him a severe rebuke that sunk him into sullen silence.

She particularly remarked, however, a fact which seemed to her very strange; namely, that their journey was conducted by roads which were anything but good, and that in the whole of their progress, during four entire days, they never entered one single large city. On the fifth day, indeed, they came to the small place called Malesherbes, which was the largest town, if it could be so called, which Annette had yet seen since she quitted Argenton. Their repose for the night had previously been in small inns of a dreary and desolate character; and during the first two or three days she had met with no very kind or careful treatment; but as she drew near Paris, the conduct of the leader of the party in whose custody she was, underwent a change: he became more respectful and attentive, and asked once or twice whether she had everything to make her comfortable.

From Malesherbes the carriage took a road on the left of that towards Fontainebleau; and after going on for four or five hours, it stopped before some iron gates to the right. One of the men on horseback dismounted and opened the gates, and, passing along an avenue, nearly a mile in length, the vehicle rolled on till it stopped before an elegant building in a modern style of architecture, forming a small country-house or chateau, with a porch supported by four Ionic pillars.

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was in the little saloon at Chanteloup, which was particularly appropriated to the Duchess of Choiseul, and which, by the taste and kindness of her husband, was filled with inestimable pictures, each small in size, but each well deserving that often misapplied epithet, exquisite, that the lady of the mansion and her nephew were seated, some seven or eight weeks after the visit to Versailles, which we have commemorated in another chapter. Ernest de Nogent—as was often his custom with an aunt that he loved—had seated himself on a sofa at the feet of the duchess, and was gazing up in her face, while she, looking down upon him, was asking, with an air slightly playful, though with a certain touch of sadness in it too—

"And so, Ernest, you have leave of absence for three months?"

"Yes, my dear aunt," he said, "I have that leave, thanks to my most kind uncle, I am sure, though he will not own it."

"And so, Ernest," continued the duchess, in the same meditative tone, and gazing on him with the same look—"and so you are going down with all speed to spend your holyday at Castle Nogent?"

"True, dear aunt," he replied; "where could I be better than by my father's side?"

"And so, Ernest," proceeded the duchess, without a change of manner, "the end of all this matter is, you are in love?"

Ernest looked down thoughtfully on the floor, for a moment or two, and then turned his eyes again to the duchess, replying frankly,

"Perhaps, my dear aunt, it is so."

"Alas! poor youth," exclaimed the duchess. "Did you consider well, when you undertook to do this rash thing of falling in love, all the griefs, and the discomforts, and anxieties, and emotions which you have yet to feel, and how often you may meet with bitter disappointment? and did you recollect all the pains and troubles of affection? I do not see what young men, with all the pleasures of life and youth glowing round about them, have to do with love. They should leave it to old women like myself. We are the only fit people for it, Ernest, you may depend upon it, whatever the world may think."

"Why, my dear aunt, have you not often told me, that you married my uncle when you were a mere child, and that you have always loved him throughout life?"

"Ay, Ernest," replied the duchess; "but I loved him first as a child, and then as a young woman, and now as an old woman; and I feel that the last is the deepest and the brightest after all, Ernest."

"Well, then, my dear aunt," replied Ernest, "I intend to follow the same plan as near as possible. To love her now as a young man, and to love her hereafter as an old one."

"Well, I suppose you must have your own way," replied the duchess, laughing; "but tell me who this Mademoiselle de St. Morin is? Who was her father?"

Ernest was about to reply very truly, that he had never inquired, and knew nothing about the matter: but at that moment one of the attendants entered the room, bearing a letter, which he presented to the young officer. "Your groom, sir," he said, "has brought this from Paris post haste, though it came by the ordinary courier, seeing that it is marked *with speed—with urgent speed*."

"It is my father's hand," said Ernest, taking it; "what can be the matter?" and immediately imagination and affection, as he recollected the delicate state of his father's health, called up a thousand pale fears from the bottom of his heart, and made them settle in his cheek.

"Open the letter, Ernest, open the letter!" cried the duchess; "we can encounter realities always better than fancies!"

Ernest tore open the letter and read aloud: "My dear boy," it went, "I write to you in haste, to tell you of an event which may be of importance, but which may be of none. Whilst I was yesterday visiting our sweet neighbour at Castelnaud, a courier arrived, bearing a letter to Mademoiselle de St. Morin, signed by her guardian, and bidding her instantly to get out to join him in Paris. There was something in the writing, and the style difficult to be

defined, which made the dear girl and myself suspect that the letter was not genuine; the appearance of the courier, too, who will give himself no other name than Pierre Jean, was in every respect against him; but we could elicit nothing from him but matter which tended to confirm the genuineness of the letter. As such a call to join her guardian was in no degree improbable, and as we could not discover a likely motive why any one should attempt to deceive her, it is determined that she shall set out this morning. An apprehension, however, rests upon my mind which I cannot shake off, and I therefore send you these lines, that you may instantly communicate with Monsieur de Castelnau, and learn whether the letter be of his writing or not. I despatch this by the ordinary courier, as he will arrive in Paris long before Mademoiselle de St. Morin; and I will only further add, that she goes by the way of Chateauroux and Orleans."

"The villains!" exclaimed Ernest de Nogent, as he concluded the letter; "the villains! But I must fly to Monsieur de Castelnau directly."

"Is it not his own doing, think you?" demanded the duchess, somewhat surprised at her nephew's agitation. "Indeed, you lovers puzzle me, Ernest. Why should you be so furious at the idea of seeing your fair lady so soon? or why should you think that Monsieur de Castelnau has not sent for her?"

"Because he pledged himself not to do so," replied Ernest de Nogent; "because he vowed that he would sooner go to the Bastille. Oh! no, no, my dear aunt. You do not understand: I must fly to him directly."

"Better fly to the police, my dear nephew," said the duchess. "If you are quite sure that somebody has been practising a fraud on this young lady, the police is the best resource."

"Alas, alas!" replied Ernest, "the police here are of no avail. It is the king, my dear aunt; it is the king who has been practising the fraud. What can the police do there?"

"Little, little will they do, indeed!" replied the duchess, now comprehending the whole matter. "Little will they do, though they ought to afford protection against his creatures as well as against all other evil doers. But fly to the Count de Castelnau: consult with him: I will speak with Monsieur de Cheiseul; and he will, I know he will, do all he can. No, Ernest, no! he will not suffer the king to violate all human rights and decencies so long as he is minister, I am sure."

"I would fain not embarrass him with such a task as this must be, my dear aunt," replied Ernest de Nogent. "I will find these people soon, depend upon it; and when I do, I will treat them in such a way as may make me need that protection, which he shall then give me if he will. No; it were better for him not to meddle with it at present, except in affording me any tidings he can obtain."

"His own dignity," replied the duchess, "must be consulted too, Ernest. This conduct has gone on too long. It has grieved him bitterly, most severely; and, for my part, I would much rather see him strip himself of all his honours and all his power, and sit down calmly here to the untingled enjoyment of fine feelings and high

tastes, than be the minister of the greatest kingdom in Europe, swaying the destinies of empires, and yet powerless either to restrain or guard against the shameless, the disgraceful depravity of the court in which he stands next to the king, or to guard the people of the realm from such indecent outrage. Yes, Ernest, yes; I would rather see him plain Stephen of Choiseul, surrounded by a few high and noble friends, than, on such conditions, prime minister of France, with all the statesmen of Europe hovering before him."

"I doubt you not in the least, my dear aunt," replied Ernest; "but in asking you not to take any notice of this affair at present, I am guided by selfish motives too. I fear that if the duke do interfere, the king may be led to pursue even more violent and unjustifiable measures. I see, now that I think more coolly, that the object contemplated at present must be to bring Mademoiselle de St. Morin to Paris against the count's inclination. They will certainly never dare venture upon anything else. Monsieur de Castelneau will, I know, send her back again at once; but if we irritate the king, he may give a positive order that she is to remain in Paris. Tell my uncle, then, all that has happened, but tell him what I have said upon the subject: he will judge best how to act both for the interests of all persons concerned and for his own honour. We may well rely upon his judgment."

"Indeed, indeed, we may," replied the duchess, "for where shall we find in Europe, a judgment equal to his?"

Thus spoke the Duchess of Choiseul; and though it may seem strange, that such sentiments should exist in the bosom of a French woman, of that age, towards her husband, yet her words were but very, very faint symbols of the feelings which that high and devoted heart contained.

Without waiting for any farther discussion, Ernest de Nogent took leave of his aunt, and mounting his horse, rode onward towards Paris as fast as he could go, calculating, by the way, what would be the best course for the count to pursue; whether to hurry on from the capital towards Castelneau, in order to undeceive Annette, and send her back again to her calm home, or to allow her to come to Paris, and then bid her return immediately. But Ernest de Nogent himself, was calculating, as we have already seen, upon false premises. He knew not to what a daring extent the vices of Louis had carried him, since he himself had quitted the post which he once held at the palace, or he would have seen, from the first moment, that it was necessary to keep Annette afar from the immediate influence of the court. Not that he ever doubted, for one moment, what would be the conduct of Annette herself, under any circumstances in which she might be placed; but, had he known all, he would have known that she might be subjected to all that is revolting, painful, and galling to a pure heart; she might be forced to mingle with scenes which were in themselves pollution, and hear words which are a disgrace to utter or to listen to.

The state of the royal power in France, at that moment, presented a very curious phenomenon. In the heart of the court, despotism was almost complete. The king's will was law to those

who immediately surrounded him: there was nothing so arbitrary, so rash, or so violent, that he dared not do within a certain distance of the capital. Paris, in fact, was France: the adjacent provinces were mere dependencies, and the farther provinces only remote colonies, where the royal authority was but faintly felt. So much, indeed, had this become the case, that when an offending nobleman was ordered to absent himself fifty miles from Paris, it was called being sent into exile, and in common parlance, no distinction was made between exile from the court and exile from the country.

In a remote province those acts of personal tyranny dared not be done which were daily enacted in the capital; and if ever the monarch was tempted to stretch the arm of despotic power to grasp some object at a distance from Paris, the ministers of his pleasure were forced to have recourse to artifice as well as violence, in order to bring the victim within the immediate vortex of the court. Nor did artifice and violence always succeed; for it is well known, that Choiseul himself, in the early part of his career, suddenly removed from the court one of his own relations to guard her from pollution, and having placed a wide space between her and the king, set his despotic power at defiance. That, however, was at a time when the passions of Louis were under some restraint from a remaining sense of propriety; but within the last few years of his reign, since the period when Ernest de Nogent had quitted the royal household to serve in the field, all ties of morality, religion, and even decency, had been cast away; and it was very wrongly that the young officer fancied Annette might be easily removed even after she had arrived in Paris.

He was revolving all these matters in his mind as he rode along, but not suffering his thoughts to delay him in his progress, when, not far from Fromenteau, he was passed by another horseman, galloping at as rapid a pace as himself. Ernest de Nogent took no notice, and did not draw his bridle; but the moment after they had crossed each other, he heard a voice exclaim, "Monsieur de Nogent, Monsieur de Nogent."

Ernest checked his horse unwillingly, and looked round to see who it was that called; when, with a feeling of satisfaction, he beheld the face of one from whom he hoped to obtain some information, if not some assistance. He accordingly turned his horse completely, and rode up to the side of the other cavalier, who had only halted to say something to him at a distance.

"Good morrow, Monsieur Morin," said the young gentleman: "did you wish to speak with me?"

"Merely to ask whither away so fast, Monsieur de Nogent," replied Pierre Morin. "I think I may want to speak with you before the day be over, and I wish to know where you are to be found."

"Can you not tell me, Monsieur Morin, what you wish to say, now?" said Ernest. "Where I shall be in the evening, I cannot at all tell. My mind is troubled with business of some importance, and I think that perhaps you may know something of the matter."

"How should I know anything of the matter?" said Pierre Morin, with a meaning smile.

"Because," replied Ernest, "you are said to know something of

every one's actions, though men know not how you obtain such an insight."

"Very easily, indeed," replied Pierre Morin, who, be it remarked, was somewhat vain, and not altogether unreasonably so, of the skill with which he procured information. "It is scarcely possible, Monsieur de Nogent, for a man to be nearly twenty years the confidential agent and adviser of two lieutenant-generals of police, and during nearly ten to exercise the principal power under them, without knowing something of every man and every family in France. Either they themselves come under our hands, or their servants, or their friends, or their enemies; and whether it be themselves, or friends, or enemies, we always learn something; so that it needs but a good memory and a quick imagination to know a great deal, and to divine a great deal more."

"There are other ways, also, I suspect, Monsieur Morin," replied Ernest; "but pray, if you do know anything of the matter which now busies me, let me hear it, and give me your advice and assistance."

"There are other means, as you say," replied Pierre Morin. "Our good friends, the *mouchards*, give us some aid; but their information would be worth little or nothing unless it were well digested after it is received. However, you are right, in another respect. I think I do know something of the matter that troubles you, though probably less than you do; but I was just now going down to speak to the Duke of Choiseul upon the subject, and inquire what can be done with safety."

"You will not find the duke," said Ernest: "he is at Versailles."

"The duke quitted Versailles," replied Pierre Morin, looking at his watch, "at five minutes after one. His carriage is by this time just rolling in through the gates of Chanteloup; and by the time I get there he will have washed his hands in the little cabinet to the left of the picture gallery, he will have taken a glass of Madeira and a biscuit, and have talked five minutes with Madame de Choiseul, so that he will, just then, be writing a letter to Monsieur de Gontaut in Corsica. But for the matter in hand," he continued, more quickly; "that which affects you is news from Castelneau, is it not? Since you received the letter that alarmed you, I have made some inquiries, though not as many as I could wish. The man, Pierre Jean, has been employed because he is a bold villain, as well as a cunning one; but there have been more sent down since to second him: six, I understand, of the lowest and most detestable scum of the court. They have dared to take upon them the name of the police, and for that they shall be punished, whatever comes of it; but we must be quick in our motions, for by this time they are half way to Paris."

As Pierre Morin spoke, a dark and heavy cloud fell over the face of Ernest de Nogent, and he gazed bitterly upon the ground, seeing that the danger was much greater than he had at first supposed, and revolving with agony of mind all the griefs, perils, and anxieties which might beset poor Annette. If it were the intention of the king, he thought, merely to bring Annette, in the first instance, to the house of her guardian in Paris, he would have contented himself with the forged summons which had been sent, and

would not have despatched so numerous a body of men, assuming the name of police. His heart burnt within him; and feelings at that moment took possession of his bosom which would have been termed treasonable by almost every man at the court of France.

"Oh! that this monster had been but a private man," he thought, "that with my own right hand I might have punished him as he deserves."

Pierre Morin marked the expression of his countenance, and very easily divined his feelings.

"Come, come, Monsieur de Nogent," he said, "do not give way! Neither be rash nor despair. All will go well, depend upon it; but we must manage this thing delicately: all will go well, I tell you, if we do not by some evil chance make a mistake in the game that we are playing. I will proceed to Chanteloup; you go back to Paris; but neither you nor the count must think of taking one step till you see me. I will join you soon, and give you information, for I am not a little interested in this matter as well as yourself. But stay," he added, after a moment, "stay. I had forgotten; you must neither mention to the count that you have seen me, nor let him know that I take any part in the affair. Do not utter my name either to him or to any one else, remember; for in all things I must act, but officially, or we shall spoil the whole business. There is nobody shall take the name of the police in France unpunished without due authority, and in chastising those who have done so, we may well set the lady free. Mention, then, not my name to any one; but in two hours and a half meet me at the hotel of Clermont Ferrand, and I will tell you more; but, mind, on no account must you commit me."

Thus saying, he turned his horse again, and rode on; and Ernest de Nogent pursued his way, thinking, "It is strange what the habit of observation will do: this man has seen me but once with Annette, and yet he seems to have discovered at once how deeply I am interested in her, and all that concerns her. It is odd, too, Annette seemed to know him; and he declares he is interested in the affair as well as myself! Yet what connexion can there be between a person in his situation and one in hers? He is evidently not a man of rank or birth; perhaps he may have been a tutor in her family."

While Ernest thus thought and rode on upon his way, Pierre Morin, mounted on a strong and exceedingly swift horse, lost no time in reaching Chanteloup. Of the persons whom he found in the court-yard, some were employed in unharnessing four splendid horses from the carriage of the duke, some gazing idly at what the others were doing, but all bowed low and humbly before the deputy of the lieutenant of police, and hastened to give him an answer to his inquiries. Pierre Morin found that his nice calculation of the prime minister's movements had been a little erroneous; the roads between Chanteloup and Versailles had been heavy. The carriage of the duke had been delayed for a few minutes by some other obstruction; and the consequence was, that the letter to Corsica had not been yet begun, and the biscuit, glass of Madeira, and conversation with the duchess were not yet concluded. Indeed, that conversation had lasted longer than it usually did, for Madame de

Choiseul had, as we have seen, matters to relate which detained her husband from his other affairs.

It was announced to the duke, while still listening to his wife's narrative, that Monsieur Morin waited to see him, and he answered — "Take him into my cabinet. I will be with him in a moment. On my life, dear Louise," he said, "it would not surprise me if Morin had come about this very business; for he told me last night that the wretch, Pierre Jean, who sticks like a bur to the skirts of the court, at once mean, unsightly, and injurious, had ~~been~~ out from Paris some time ago on a mission which he believed to be not of the very best description. I will speak with him at once, and let you know what he says. I am sick to the death at all this infamy, and I see that worse is coming still."

Thus saying, he quitted the duchess, and proceeded to the cabinet, where Pierre Morin was waiting. The agent of police bowed down to the ground before the prime minister, and the minister welcomed him with a gracious inclination, pointing to a seat, and bidding him sit down, without any assumption of state and dignity, such as the Duke of Choiseul might very likely have displayed in dealing with a man of less worth but higher rank: for the character of Pierre Morin was well known to him, and he was aware that such truth and honesty as his were seldom found combined with so much skill, shrewdness, and knowledge of human nature.

"Well, my good friend," he said, "what brings you to Chanteloup to-day? I trust that nothing new has gone amiss."

"That, my lord, you must decide," replied Pierre Morin: "I come to you for information in regard to what has really taken place, and I hope we shall find that it is not amiss."

"Perhaps I may divine the nature of your errand, Monsieur Morin," replied the duke; "but I would fain hear, in the first instance, what it is from your own mouth."

"It were best so to do, my lord," replied the officer; "and if I might take a great liberty, I would ask that you answer my questions without going farther than the mere matter of them, and without showing me any of your own views; for we may both be called upon hereafter to give an account of what we say upon this subject; and as neither you nor I will tell a lie, we may as well have the truth convenient."

"Well, well," said the duke; "propose your questions, Monsieur Morin: you are accustomed to interrogatories; and I thank you for your hint. The rest I will judge of as we proceed."

Pierre Morin then went on to detail, very briefly, but with a more accurate knowledge than any other man in the whole kingdom possessed, except the actors in the transaction, the whole particulars of what had befallen Annette; taking great care to avoid the slightest mention of the king's name, or to hint that any higher person could be engaged in the affair than those who had actually appeared on the scene.

When he concluded the detail, the duke demanded, without other comment, "Well, Monsieur Morin, who do you think is the instigator of this affair?"

"Nay, my lord," replied Pierre Morin, "that I do not know; and, to say the truth, I do not at present intend to inquire; but —"

"Right, right!" answered the duke, after a moment's thought: "I understand you; you are right; there is but that one way! Go on with your questions."

"Well, then, my lord," continued Pierre Morin; "you see, here is a flagrant breach of the law committed; and, moreover, an insult of the grossest kind offered to the police; unless your lordship or some of the ministers authorised these men to make this arrest, and to call themselves by a false name. May I ask if you did so?"

"Certainly not," replied the duke, with a smile: "and I can at once answer that none of the ministers gave such authority, which is contrary to every principle of law and justice. We should merit, and doubtless incur, the most severe indignation of the king were we to countenance such things."

"Very well, then, my lord," replied Pierre Morin, "my counsel is very clear. I have already informed the lieutenant-general, my chief, that certain persons of bad repute have been passing themselves off for his agents, and making arrests as if under his authority; and he immediately gave me orders for apprehending them; but I thought it best to make sure that the matter had not taken place under lawful authority. As I now find," he continued, with marked emphasis, "that your lordship and all the ministers of the crown are ignorant of the whole transaction, I shall at once lodge all the parties concerned in the Chatelet, putting them *au secret*, till such time as we can gain full information as to their designs."

"An excellent plan, Monsieur Morin," replied the duke: "an excellent plan. But what do you intend to do with the young lady?"

"On that I will take your lordship's advice," replied Pierre Morin. "It might be best to send her back at once into Quercy; but, poor thing, she has had a long and fatiguing journey already, and —"

"You seem to take a great interest in her, Monsieur Morin," said the duke, suddenly.

"I do, indeed, my lord," replied Pierre Morin; "and so would your lordship, if you saw and knew her. She is as beautiful and sweet a creature as ever you beheld."

"And her name is very like your own, Monsieur Morin," answered the duke.

Pierre Morin made him a low bow, out of which it was impossible to extract any definite meaning, adding, at the same time, "Your lordship does me a great deal of honour; but I am merely a simple *roturier*, and neither a noble nor a saint, as the two first syllables of her name imply. But still what would your lordship have me to do with her?"

"Hark ye, Morin," said the duke, speaking in a low voice— "Send her back again at once, without a moment's delay. I would protect her to the best of my power here; but there are some things in which I am powerless."

"Only in small things, my lord," replied Pierre Morin; "in great ones, none so powerful: for the king said yesterday to the Count de Lude, as they were walking under the orangery, that if all the other ministers were to oppose your opinion, and all the statesmen

in Europe were to back them, he would take your judgment against theirs, and feel sure of success."

The duke looked pleased; but replied, with a meaning smile, "Why, Monsieur Morin; Monsieur Morin, how do you learn all the king's private conversation? You have not, surely, any of the gentlemen, whom you term your good friends the *mouchards*, near the royal person?"

"We have them everywhere, my lord," replied Pierre Morin, with a reverential bow, "ay, and in all classes. It would be very disrespectful, indeed, to his majesty not to pay him the same attention we pay to the rest of his subjects. Besides, as we have few opportunities of asking his will, how should we know it upon slight occasions, if we did not give heed to such casual indications of his pleasure? The truth also, is, my lord, that the *bureau de police* is, in fact, the Temple of Fame which one of our poets has been writing about, and every one who has a little piece of information to dispose of, carries it thither direct."

"It is a strange system," said the duke, musing: "a strange system, indeed, Monsieur Morin; and I cannot think a good one."

"Neither you nor I framed it, my lord," replied Pierre Morin. "You found it as it is: it made me what I am. You must use it: I must follow it. Besides, it is like one of those powder-carts that I have seen following the army, on which the tired men sometimes jump up to ride, neither the most convenient nor the safest conveyance, but yet better than none."

"Pray heaven, it do not explode, and blow us all to atoms!" said the duke.

"What will be, will be!" answered Pierre Morin, with a true French shrug of indifference; and adding, "As I find your lordship is not at all cognisant of those men's conduct, I will proceed against them in the usual course," he bowed low, and retired.

CHAPTER XXV. •

THE Hotel de Clermont Ferrand, at the time we speak of, was vacant as a residence, at least for anything else than rats and mice. The proprietor was a young man then absent with the army: the woman put in to keep the place in order, who was the widow of an old porter, was absent, gossiping with her neighbours the greater part of the day, and slept at the house of her daughter, at some distance from that place. She vowed that it was impossible to rest there, on account of the long-tailed denizens whom we have mentioned; and who, according to her account, danced all night over her head, rather in the measure of a gavot than of a minuet.

It was sometimes convenient for the agents of the police to have a place where they could meet with a suspicious friend, somewhat less dangerous to their guest than the central bureau. To meet this contingency in his own case, Pierre Morin had communicated his views to the good lady, who made him a most reverential courtesy; and, being assured of a certain piece of money and the protection of the police, year by year, she gave her good friend a key of

the mansion, and took care never to present herself upon inexpedient occasions.

About five o'clock on the day of Pierre Morin's visit to the Duke of Choiseul, Ernest de Nogent entered the court of the hotel we have mentioned, and applied himself in vain to various doors for admission. Not one of them either yielded to his hand or returned the slightest answer, except a low murmuring echo, which spoke of emptiness. He looked at his watch; he was exactly to his time; and, though he was suffering under impatience, that disease which renders men more inconsiderate than probably any other, he did not bethink himself that Pierre Morin might be kept by some other engagement a few minutes longer than the time he had appointed.

He therefore walked up and down the court, determined to wait the event; and in about ten minutes, the figure of him he expected suddenly appeared under the archway. Ernest was advancing to speak to him; but another man suddenly came up, touched Monsieur Morin on the arm, and addressed him in a low tone, and with an important face.

Pierre Morin paused and listened, and then demanded, "Ha! When?"

"Two hours ago!" replied the man, who appeared by his dress to be either a writing or a drawing master. "I saw him myself as he came out."

"Which way did he take?" demanded Pierre Morin: "to his father's house, or to the south?"

"To neither," answered the stranger: "he went home first, to the lodging which he hired three months ago; but then he shaved and dressed himself, and getting into a *chaise de poste*, rolled away to Versailles."

"Ha!" said Pierre Morin: "then, my good friend, your business is to go after him. Tell our friend, the marquis, to let me hear all that passes within the palace; but do you watch where he goes yourself, when he quits the king, and let me know something more at the grand bureau, by eight o'clock."

All this was said so low, that Ernest, who had taken a turn to the other side of the court, as soon as he saw how busily Pierre Morin was engaged, heard not a word; and the disguised emissary of the police, as soon as he had received the above directions, glided quietly away, without making any reply.

No sooner was he gone, than Pierre Morin advanced to meet the young officer, saying, "I have now obtained all the information I wanted. The young lady is within twenty miles of Paris, and she shall be free before midnight. What says the Count de Castelnau to the contents of your letter?"

"I have not seen him," replied Ernest de Nogent; "for before I arrived, some ten minutes, the servant said he had set out for Versailles, having been summoned thither by a special messenger from the king."

"Ha!" said Pierre Morin, "that is strange, too! They would keep him out of the way. But what is to be done with the young lady? that is the question; whether to bring her to Paris to his hotel at once, or to send her back to Castelnau."

"Oh, send her back," exclaimed Ernest de No-

gent. "In heaven's name, keep her not here, if you have any interest in her fate."

"I have, indeed, young gentleman," replied Pierre Morin: "more than you know of. But though I can set her free, it is impossible for me to guard her back again to Castlneau, as I could wish to do. I cannot be absent myself without distinct orders. I cannot spare more than two men to go such a distance, and only one of those can be of my own people, while the people who are pursuing her may be many, and certainly will be unscrupulous."

"Let me, then, undertake that part," replied Ernest de Nogent. "You set her free. Give me two men to help me; my own servant, myself, and a man I can hire, will make five; and I will answer with my life she shall reach Castlneau in safety."

Pierre Morin smiled. "I fear it may be dangerous for you," he said, "in more ways than one; but, however, I must have an hour or two decide, for I have other persons to consult. Such things as these cannot be done without counsel, and I have many things to think of and to do. It is now five of the clock, meet me at ten to-night, with the two men you speak of, in the grounds of the small chateau of Michy. Do you know it?"

"No, I do not," replied Ernest de Nogent; "but I will easily find it: where does it lie?"

"Between Longueville and Malesherbes," replied Pierre Morin: "make for Longueville in the first place, then ride on straight before you as if you were going to Puisselet, and take the first turning to your right. On your left you will find a gate—it is the first gate you come to. Go in there, and a little farther on, you will see the chateau. Do not go near it, however, but keep amongst the trees to the left. Take no notice of anything you see or hear till I come, for people may be passing up and down the road. Draw your horses amongst the trees, and keep them as much screened as possible."

"Oh! I will manage all that," replied Ernest de Nogent; "I am a soldier, you know, and accustomed to such things. You will join me there then; but how can we convey Mademoiselle de St. Morin back?"

"I will bring a carriage with me," replied the commissary, "only you be punctual to your hour and careful in your movements. These are matters in which slight mistakes ruin great enterprises."

"Trusting to you entirely," replied Ernest de Nogent, "I will follow your directions to the letter; but we must all make haste, if you have any other persons to see in Paris; for our time is very short, and the way long, I think."

"Oh! no," replied the commissary, "'tis not seven leagues. Quick horses and willing minds, and we shall accomplish the matter easily."

Ernest asked him to repeat once more the directions he had given, and then left him to make hasty preparations for his journey. Those preparations, however, required consideration; for he had, in the first place, to engage some one to assist him; and, in the next place, he had to communicate by letter to the Count de Castlneau both what had occurred and the course he was about

to pursue. When he came to perform the latter part of his task, he found it much more difficult to execute than he had anticipated; for in the eagerness which he had felt for the deliverance of her he loved, he had totally forgotten to ask himself what time he had to interfere in the matter. He now recollected, however, that that time might be questioned by others, and something told him that it might be questioned by the Count de Castleneau himself; so that it was with some embarrassment, and after considerable thought, that he at length accomplished the undertaking.

He told the count then that the letter from his father which he enclosed, had reached him at Chanteloup, and that his absence from Paris at the time of its arrival had unfortunately prevented him from communicating it before the count's departure for Versailles. He then went on to say, he had received information from good authority, that after having been induced to set out from Castleneau by a spurious letter, Mademoiselle de St. Morin had been subjected to a false arrest, and was even then detained in the neighbourhood of Paris. Under these circumstances, he added—avoiding all mention either of Pierre Morin's part in the affair, or of his own suspicions regarding the king—that he had determined to endeavour to liberate Mademoiselle de St. Morin at once, and would immediately communicate the result to Monsieur de Castleneau. He apologised for acting in the matter upon his own responsibility; but said, that he had many reasons, which the count could well conceive, for seeking to free Mademoiselle de St. Morin with the least possible delay.

This task being accomplished, and the letter having been left at the house of the count, Ernest next proceeded to ensure the assistance of an old soldier, who had formerly served in his own regiment. Horses also were to be hired; but being thoroughly acquainted with the city of Paris, and being himself well known and respected, that part of the undertaking was easily effected, and by half past seven o'clock, he was in the saddle, and on the road to Longueville. He passed through that little village after a quick ride in a dark night, at about a quarter before ten, and then proceeding somewhat more slowly, he followed exactly the directions of Pierre Morin, watching all the turnings narrowly as they had been described to him. The way, indeed, seemed much longer than he had been told it was; and he was beginning to fancy that he must have made a mistake, when by the very faint light that still existed, he perceived a gate upon the left, which opened easily to his hand. He accordingly went in, followed by his two attendants, and closing the entrance carefully behind him, advanced up an avenue of trees, which apparently led towards the chateau he was seeking.

The night, as I have said, was extremely dark; and Ernest de Noyon looked for some time for the mansion in vain. In the end, however, he perceived the dark lines of a building at some distance on the road, and to the left, as Pierre Morin had described, some scattered groups of trees at the distance of about a hundred yards from the avenue. "As soon as he had satisfied himself that this was the spot which the deputy of the lieutenant-general had meant, he quitted the road, and proceeded to shelter himself under the

trees; in doing which his horse took fright at a roe-deer, which started from the bushes, and rearing violently, had nearly fallen back with him. Ernest de Nogent, however, who was a bold and practised horseman, forced the animal forward amongst the trees, and then dismounting, quieted and pacified him, to prevent the fretful racing into which the struggle had thrown it.

Before this was fully accomplished, he heard the sound of other horses' feet coming up the avenue, and in a minute or so after, as he gazed intently forward, he saw distinctly three or four dark forms ride rapidly along the road. The murmur of voices, too, was heard; and just as they reached the nearest point to himself, one of the speakers raised his tone, saying, with a short, peculiar, and disagreeable laugh, "We will soon see: they have taken care of the gate, I hope."

Ernest said not a word, and his heart beat a good deal—but it was with anger, not with fear, and he gazed steadily towards the building which was before his eyes for several minutes. As the shadow was there darker, he could just faintly distinguish several horsemen pause and dismount; but a moment after, a large door in the centre of the building opened, and from the bright light which issued forth he perceived clearly that the suspicions which the tone of the voice and the peculiar laugh he had heard induced him to entertain, were not without foundation, for in the graceful though somewhat spare form that first entered the chateau, he instantly recognised the person of the Baron de Cajare.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WE must now quit the cool outer air for a short time, and enter into an abode of revelry and merriment, within which, ever since darkness had set in, a party of five men and three women had been eating and drinking, and laughing and singing, and holding a conversation which, though the language and the absolute terms might be something more refined than they would have been in a *cabaret* of the common people, was in substance and meaning of a more gross, disgusting, and degrading kind than might have been expected, in any ordinary circumstances, in the poorest *guberge* in France.

Those members of the lower orders who ape the vices of the higher classes are sure to become even more disgustingly depraved than when they remain satisfied with the coarser vices more common in their own rank. The men and women here assembled were the lowest grade of the vicious followers of a vicious court; and there was mixed with the libertine slang, which they had acquired in their base services to those above them, a vulgarity which left their profligacy naked in its most horrible form. There was, withal, a merriment, too, and a levity, and an affectation of wit and suariness, which rendered the caricature of that abandoned court complete.

But it is forbidden to me in these pages to draw the minute traits of a picture so revolting; and contenting my self with this

general description, I must leave the whole preceding part of the conversation that was there going on unsaid, up to the moment when one of the party, with a foaming glass of rich wine in his hand, and a licentious jest upon his lips, suddenly started, and set down the glass, exclaiming, "*Ventre Saint Gris!* There are horses' feet. It cannot be the king at this hour!"

"The king!" cried another. "Sot! Animal! Don't you know that the king never rides now-a-days, except when he is hunting? No, no, it is some of those *foquins* of the court. Go you, Merliton, and see. There, they are ringing the bell like fury. Quick, quick! get them into another room, and put those two bottles away. Monsieur Albert must haul us over the coals if he found us drinking his Epernay."

Great bustle and confusion now took place in the room, while the man they called Merliton—which was evidently a *nom de guerre*—proceeded slowly to open the door, with eyes somewhat inflamed with the debauch, though his step was steady, and his mind was still clear. The moment the entrance was free, a gentleman, carrying a cane in this hand, walked coolly in, and was taking his way along the passage of the house without pausing or asking any questions.

Merliton, however, threw himself suddenly in his way, exclaiming, "Who the devil are you, and what do you want? This is no place for such cool gentry to march in, as if they were at home. Yes, sir," he continued, as the other gazed at him from head to foot with a contemptuous look—"yes, sir, it is I, your very obedient humble servant; but indeed, sweet sir, you have the advantage of me! Pray, who are you?"

"Be so good as to move out of my way," said the Baron de Cajare, coolly, but appearing to be animated with the purpose of raising the cane which he carried in his hand, and applying it to the shoulders of Master Merliton.

At that moment, however, a personage with one eye, to whom the reader has been already introduced, passed the stranger suddenly, exclaiming, "Merliton, thou art drunk: drunk as was thy mother at the moment of thy birth. She was canteen woman, monsieur-le baron," he continued, addressing Monsieur de Cajare—"she was canteen woman to the thirteenth regiment, and assured me, upon her honour, and a woman of honour she was, that, to the best of her recollection, she had never been one whole day sober for forty years. So, my good friend Merliton, there, must have been born when she was drunk. You see he does not disgrace his parentage. Now, Merliton, get out of the way, there's a good fellow, or I shall be obliged to let the light through you, and a man with a key-hole in him is not so good as a door!"

At these words Merliton drew somewhat back, and the baron passed on, saying to Pierre Jean, who had accompanied him, "This may be very amusing, but it does not please me. Show me into some room, and send me somebody whom this young lady has not yet seen amongst these men."

The baron was accordingly taken to a vacant chamber, and a light was speedily brought; but it was more difficult a great deal to find a person who had not been seen by Mademoiselle de S.

Morin, for every one of the party in the house had contrived to visit her apartment in turn, not a little to her annoyance and grief. As soon as it was ascertained that such was the case, the baron ordered one of the men who had accompanied him, and who had remained without, with two other attendants, in charge of the horses, to be brought in; and followed by him, he proceeded up stairs to the apartment in which, as he was told, Annette was to be found; the key being given to him at the foot of the stairs, for she had been held as a close prisoner, together with her own servants, since she had arrived from Castelneau. The apartment in which she was confined contained four chambers: the first of which was an ante-room, where the two men-servants were now seated. They both started up on the entrance of the baron, with looks which indicated a strong resolution to resist any further insolence towards their mistress to the best of their power, however small that power might be. The moment, however, that they beheld the Baron de Cajarc, whom they had frequently seen at Castelneau, their faces brightened; for any countenance but those which had lately presented themselves seemed to them that of a friend.

The baron instantly caught the change of expression, and understood what it meant: he accordingly held up his hand with a meaning look, as if to caution them against making any noise, inquiring, at the same time, in a low voice, "Where is your mistress?"

"Here, sir, here," said the old servant, Jerome: "she will be so glad to see you, I am sure. She is in this room with Madame Donnine and her maid."

Thus saying, the old man led the way and opened the door, and the baron followed, with a quiet step, taking his tone from what had just passed.

As soon as she saw him, Annette rose; but it was with very different feelings from those which Jerome had imagined she would entertain. For a moment Annette did not feel quite sure that he himself was not the contriver of the whole scheme under which she had suffered, and, consequently, her first sensations tended towards indignation rather than pleasure. Various circumstances, however, presenting themselves rapidly to her mind, made her judge more favourably the next moment, and believe that the Baron de Cajarc had no immediate share in the transactions of the last few days; so that her look of anger and dismay speedily underwent a change.

On his part, the baron, skilful in reading the human countenance, marked the first expression which appeared upon hers; and bowing low, but distantly, he said, "I have come, Mademoiselle de St. Morin, perhaps, too presumptuously, considering all things, to free you from the hands of the insolent villains who have got possession of you, and to convey you to a place of safety: if you will so far pardon me as to accept of my aid."

Poor Annette knew but too little of the world, and the tone in which he spoke tended still more to remove her apprehensions. She thought she had done him injustice, and replied, mildly and gratefully, "Indeed, Monsieur de Cajarc, I feel infinitely obliged, and can, of course, regard such an act of kindness as no presumption. Oh! far far from it!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands, as

all the painful particulars of her situation came back more forcibly to her mind. "How shall I ever be able to show myself grateful enough to any one that will free me from these people, who are not, who cannot be, I am sure, the police of the realm!"

"The police!" exclaimed the Baron de Cajare, very well satisfied with the progress he had already made; "they may be the object of the good offices of the police, ere long, but otherwise, they have nothing more to do with the police than the man who was executed in the *Grevé* a few days ago. The object in regard to yourself will be explained hereafter; the only thing to be done now, is to set you free."

"Oh! let us go! let us go, immediately!" replied Annette, taking a step towards the door.

"Nay, nay," said the baron, with a smile, "we must pause a little yet. A carriage will be here directly, to bear you to a place of security at once; and, in the meantime, as I have reason to believe that some of these villains are still lingering about in the grounds, I must go and dislodge them with my servants, that we may meet with no obstruction."

"But where are you going to take me to, Monsieur de Cajare?" said Annette. "Of course, I had better go, at once, to Monsieur de Castelnau."

"He was at Versailles when I quitted it," replied the Baron de Cajare, "and thither do I propose to take you, mademoiselle. You may rely on my honour, I think, and be quite sure that I will place you in perfect security."

Annette would have fain had a more definite explanation; and the vagueness of the baron's words renewed, whether she would or not, her former apprehensions. She resolved not to show any fears, however; for she felt that her situation could not be well worse than what it was, and she therefore only added, "Pray, let us go quickly, Monsieur de Cajare! Every moment that I stay in this place is terrible to me."

"I will but insure that these people have quitted the park," replied the baron, "and return to you without loss of time."

As he spoke, he gazed upon the sweet girl whom he addressed, with a look of admiration and tenderness which he could not repress. He took care, indeed, that it should not be disrespectful, but it revived, in a considerable degree, Annette's fears and apprehensions in regard to his object, and made her think, with dislike, of incurring a debt of obligation towards a man for whom she had learnt to entertain a strong antipathy.

After leaving her, the baron paused in the corridor, musing for a moment, while his servant held the lamp, and ending his reverie with a few muttered words, which even the man close to him did not hear distinctly.

"It will be a difficult game," he said to himself; but it must be played!"

As these words were never fully explained by him to any one, and as his actions did not afterwards afford the interpretation, we must draw back, for a moment, the curtain of the breast, and, looking into the heart, investigate what were the emotions passing within; what were the objects he proposed to himself; what were

the purposes with which he came thither. It may easily be understood, that the Baron de Cajare had not personally the power, if he had the inclination, of freeing Annette from the hands of those who, now held her in a state of unlawful captivity; and though, perhaps, to those who are well read in the annals of the reign of Louis XV. and know the base subserviency of that monarch's courtiers, the conduct of the baron might give reasonable cause for believing he was base enough to lend himself to the licentious views of the king; yet such was not the case. He had, it is true, been suddenly freed from captivity, had been sent for to Versailles, and had held a long and confidential communication with the monarch on the very subject of Annette de St. Morin; for Louis, and almost all the members of his court, well knew that the good baron was in no degree scrupulous, in any point, where his own interests were concerned. He had strong passions, it was true; and sometimes, indeed, those passions had been known to get the better of his interested views; but he restrained them, in general, by the power of a cool and calculating mind; and the king believed, that the taming which he had lately undergone in the Bastille, must have brought down any spirit of resistance to the level which was desired. The baron had listened, then, with the utmost complacency during his interview with the monarch, even assisted the king with an appropriate word every now and then, when Louis found a difficulty in explaining his own meaning; and showed not the slightest surprise, disgust, or indignation, at proposals which were an insult to him, and a gross and horrible injustice towards Annette. But all the time that the conversation was proceeding, the baron was calculating, in his own mind, whether there might or might not be a possibility, not only of frustrating the king's designs, but also of making them serviceable to his own views and purposes in regard to Annette.

Strange to say, the Baron de Cajare really loved Annette; she was indeed the only being he had ever loved; but her beauty and her grace had commenced what difficulties, and opposition, and coldness had finished. As but too often happens, those very feelings of repugnance towards him on her part, which should have checked his pursuit, had only urged him forward the more vehemently; and he resolved, even while the king spoke, to risk all that even the anger and indignation of a despotic monarch can effect, to obtain possession of her he loved. The king, in the course of their interview, had instructed him to bring Annette to Versailles, making a show of delivering her from the hands of those who had brought her from the south; and the baron calculated that an opportunity would be thus afforded him of laying before the fair object of such machinations the alternative of remaining in the power of a licentious monarch, armed with despotic authority, or of uniting her fate with his, and quitting the court of France altogether.

Difficulties, indeed, he knew, might interpose; but such difficulties had been overcome in other instances by art, if not by force, and he doubted not in the least that Annette's choice would soon be made, if she once became fully aware of the dangers of her situation. He had determined, therefore, to obey the king's orders to

the letter, to a certain extent; to take Annette to Versailles, and at the moment that she became fully aware of all the horrors that surrounded her, to present to her the means of escape by uniting her fate with his. He had, however, another task in hand, which he now hastened to perform.

Alas for human plans! In the very first instance, after the momentary pause of thought which we have mentioned, the Baron de Cajarc accidentally destroyed the very last vestige of that confidence in his goodness of purpose, which his manner and tone had at first revived, for a moment, in Annette's bosom. After he left her, the young lady remained standing in the middle of the room, thinking silently over what had just passed, and her meditation lasted longer than his, for his was only produced by a momentary apprehension lest his skill and cunning should not be sufficient to outwit the king, whilst hers had for its object all the dangers, difficulties, and anxieties that surrounded her. She was roused, however, two or three minutes after, by hearing a voice, which she well recognised as his, exclaiming, in a loud and impatient tone—"Pierre Jean, Pierre Jean! where have you got to now?"

At once everything like trust or hope vanished from her bosom in an instant. "He is a confederate, then," she thought, "with the chief instrument of those who have deceived and betrayed me." The next question which she put to her own heart naturally was, "Is he not himself the instigator of all that has taken place? Is he not himself now trying to deceive me with a hope of escape, while he is the person who has brought me into this situation?" The disappointment of hope and expectation, the bewilderment of discovering so much baseness and treachery, the despair of finding any one to deliver her, overcame the courage and strength of mind which had hitherto supported her; and, sitting down at the table where good Donnine had remained watching the countenance of her mistress, Annette covered her eyes with her hands, and wept bitterly.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHILE this was passing within the little Chateau of Michy—a place which had been privately bought by Louis the Fifteenth, with views and purposes of the most disgraceful kind—Ernest de Nogent had remained amongst the trees, as he had been directed by Pierre Morin, though the sight of the Baron de Cajarc had tempted him, almost beyond his power of resistance, to enter the chateau, and endeavour at once to set Annette at liberty. He had but two men with him, however; the baron had evidently been accompanied by three; and, from the words which had fallen from the deputy of the lieutenant of police, he had every reason to believe that there were many more within the chateau itself. He paused, then, and watched; not knowing what was to take place next, and determined, at all risks, to interfere if any attempt were made to remove Annette before the arrival of Pierre Morin. After waiting for some time, anxiously listening for every sound, he

began to suspect that the Baron de Cajare had caused the gates to be closed after him, and that the police might be delayed by that obstacle. Under this impression, he directed one of those who had accompanied him to return on foot to the gate, and if he found it locked, to do what he could to open it.

The man had not been gone five minutes, however, when some one bearing a torch was seen to issue forth from the chateau; another succeeded, and then another; till at length six or seven flambeaux appeared before the house, and began to move about in different directions through the small space of open ground called the park. The enclosure did not, indeed, contain more than fifty or sixty acres, so that no one could lie concealed for any great length of time; but there were apparently numerous groups of trees and thick bushes, and those amongst which the young officer was now standing afforded an irregular screen, which, by a step taken hither or thither, might be made to hide his party from the eyes of any one who did not actually enter the thicket.

The horses he had placed in a spot where they could not be seen, as soon as he had become as much acquainted with the ground as the darkness would permit; and though he doubted not that the rearing and plunging of his charger, when scared by the roc-deer, had attracted the attention of the Baron de Cajare, yet he hoped to conceal himself where he was, till the arrival of the police. He was now not a little apprehensive, however, lest the man whom he had sent to the gate might be intercepted on his return, and he listened eagerly for any sound, while the torch-bearers wandered over the ground in parties of two or three, evidently in search of somebody or something.

Circling round him at a distance, the blaze of light was seen wavering here and there through the darkness of the night; now flashing broad and red upon the ground, now appearing and disappearing through the trees. At length Ernest's quick ear caught the sound of a step approaching; but at that moment one of the torch-bearers was seen to rush forward and throw his torch down upon the grass, calling loudly, "Here is one of them!—here is one of them! Follow quick—follow quick!" Several others instantly rushed forward, and at the same moment the servant whom he had sent to the gate, ran up to the side of Ernest de Nogent, while the other party came on, chasing him rapidly.

There were two or three stout trees in front, with but small spaces between them, while to the right and left was the thicket; and finding that he must now absolutely stand upon his defence, Ernest took advantage of the situation, with the prompt decision of an experienced soldier.

"Draw your swords!" he exclaimed. "Between those two trees, Martin! Guard that open space on your left. I will take care of your right. Here, Pierrot! Come in here. Now, spare no man, for they are doing what is not lawful."

Almost as he spoke, the Baron de Cajare, with four others, amongst whom was Pierre Jean himself, some bearing torches and some without, came so close that the faces of the one party became visible to the other.

"Down with your arms and surrender!" shouted the Baron de Cajare. "What do you here at this hour of night?"

"I ask you the same question, sir," replied Ernest de Nogent. "Stand off," he continued, "stand off, I say, or you are a dead man."

The baron, nevertheless, advanced with his drawn sword held lightly in his hand, as if he did not expect that Ernest de Nogent would attempt any serious resistance; and the young gentleman did, indeed, feel a disinclination to injure a man who seemed not upon his guard. When he had taken two more steps forward, however, the Baron de Cajare threw himself in an instant into an attitude of attack; and, well knowing that protection would be afforded him for anything he might do, lunged fiercely at the bosom of his opponent. Fortunately, Ernest de Nogent had not been entirely thrown off his guard: the baron's foot slipped a little on the dewy turf, and the young officer, parrying his lunge in tierce, took advantage of that circumstance to get within his adversary's point, and then, drawing up his left foot, he struck him a violent blow with the hilt of his sword upon the face, exclaiming, in the indignation of his heart, "Traitor and scoundrell!"

The violence of the blow overthrew the balance of his adversary, and the baron fell back bleeding profusely from a bruised gash under his eye. He started on his feet again in a moment, however, recovered his guard as quickly as possible, and, exclaiming in a much cooler tone than might have been expected—"Hold the torches, hold the torches!" recommenced his attack upon the young officer with cold and bitter determination.

He was a complete master of his weapon, and was now aware of the slippery nature of the ground. His opponent, indeed, was scarcely inferior to him in skill, and was a taller and more powerful man; but his two servants were attacked on either side at the same moment, and others of the torch-bearers were seen hurrying up from the various parts of the ground over which they had been scattered, as if to take Ernest's small party in the rear.

Pierre Jean, for his part, stood by calmly, holding the torch to give light to the scene of combat between the Baron de Cajare and Ernest de Nogent; and ever and anon when he saw a good pass exchanged, he put his left hand up under his hat, and, scratching his head, exclaimed, "Bravo, bravo!" in the tone of a connoisseur.

At length, however, he seemed to think that the baron was not making such progress as could be wished; for he shifted the torch from his right to his left hand, put the right into his pocket, and, drawing forth a pistol, demanded, in a deliberate tone, "Shall I shoot him, monsieur?"

"No, no!" exclaimed the baron, angrily, "leave him to me! In three minutes I will kill him like a dog."

A sharp wound in the neck, however, at that moment, taught him that he must be careful lest he should be killed himself. But the sight of the torches, now gathering closely round the clump of trees, and some of them even entering the thicket, made him feel fully confident that his enemy was altogether in his power. He continued the combat, indeed; but it was with a dark and treacherous purpose, which would have crossed the minds of few men but himself at a moment of such fierce excitement. "When they are

upon him from behind," he thought, "and he is embarrassed with them, I will lunge and kill him;" and, in pursuance of this plan, he kept his blade playing lightly round that of Ernest de Nogent, ready at any opportune moment to put his base design in execution.

That moment was almost come; for a torch was seen struggling through the trees behind, casting its red glare upon the brown stalks and yellow leaves around, not ten yards from the spot where the combat was going on; and with the fierce exultation of nearly gratified hatred, the baron was holding his breath, and scanning eagerly the form of his adversary, calculating where and how he would strike him, when suddenly, to his astonishment, Pierre Jean dropped the lighted end of his torch towards the ground, as if his arm were paralysed, and, with a face turning deadly pale, looked sharply round over his left shoulder.

This curious effect was produced by a talismanic touch, and a few low-sounding words which Pierre Jean knew right well. The next moment the Baron de Cajare himself found a hand upon his shoulder, and "*De par le roi*" once more sounded in his ear. Turning fiercely round, he beheld the fine countenance of Pierre Morin bent sternly upon him, and, in rage at his disappointment, he had well nigh plunged his sword into the breast of the commissary; but Morin, without any weapon, still held his grasp, saying, "Monsieur de Cajare, you are my prisoner! Surrender your sword."

"Sir, you are making a mistake," exclaimed the baron, furiously, "and this time your insolence shall not go unpunished."

"I am making no mistake, Monsieur le Baron," replied Pierre Morin; "nor am I using any insolence. Heaven forbid that I should, to a gentleman of your condition."

"But the king, sir," exclaimed the baron; "the king has ——"

"Given you no authority to do what you have been doing," replied Pierre Morin. "In one word, sir, I know you have seen the king. I know what directions were given you; and if you will take my advice, you will not compromise his majesty's name in any manner, but will refrain from divulging secrets with which he may have condescended to trust you. Take him away, Monsieur Joachim; his abode is to be now the Chatelet. Suffer him to speak with no one till I have received his deposition myself, and prevent him from saying anything that may be disagreeable to the king. Paul, see that none of these other people escape. Are there enough men on the other side of the copse? Master Pierre Jean, I think we shall hang you now. I told you the last time that you would not be satisfied till you had eaten the rope. Monsieur de Cajare, you had better go quietly, or you must have your wrists decorated with ruffles that gentlemen do not like. Now, sir, who are you?" he continued, advancing towards Ernest de Nogent, as if he had never seen him before; but then, approaching a little nearer, he proceeded, "Ah! Monsieur de Nogent, is it you? I suppose you have come here to inquire after Mademoiselle de St. Morin? She is to be conducted to Versailles."

These words were pronounced aloud, and they had a strange effect upon both the parties who heard them. The Baron de Ca-

iare, who had not yet ceased to resist the efforts made to draw him from the scene, became for the first time fully convinced that Pierre Morin had really received orders from the king; and, cursing the treachery and fickleness of absolute monarchs, he submitted, and was led away. The heart of Ernest de Nogent fell at such tidings, and he gazed for a moment in agony upon the calm unchanging countenance of the commissary.

Pierre Morin, however, advanced towards the point where several torches were still seen in the thicket, and in doing so he passed close by the spot where Earnest stood, stupified and horror-struck. Morin neither turned his head nor looked toward him; but, as he passed, the young officer heard a low voice say, "Not a word! and do not be alarmed."

Ernest, however, could not help feeling many an apprehension in regard to the situation of his sweet Annette; but at that moment one of the exempts demanded of his leader, "What are we to do with this gentleman, Monsieur le Commissaire? We have no orders."

"Nor I either," replied Pierre Morin; "you must let him alone. He has had nothing to do with the affair of counterfeiting the police. You will only arrest those whose names you have on the list, especially Pierre Jean, great Merliton and little Merliton, and the rest, with the three servants of Monsieur de Cajare. But there seem to me so many of these gentry that you had better call up the archers from the gate, and let the others keep all round this spot till they come. We have got them in a net, and must take care not to let them out."

"Oh! we have plenty of men, sir; we have plenty without the archers," said the man called Paul.

"Ay, but I must have five or six with me to search the house," replied Pierre Morin. "I cannot wait here all night till you have got these fellows out of the thicket. I have that case of poisoning in the Marais to investigate, and the man who committed forgery to interrogate, before I go to bed to-night. The lieutenant-general is ill, you know; so it all falls upon me."

A messenger ran off immediately to bring the rest of the police from the gate; and in the meanwhile Ernest de Nogent, bethinking himself of the situation of the two men who had accompanied him thither, addressed the commissary, saying, "These two are my servants, Monsieur Morin: I hope that they are not to be detained."

"Oh! no, oh no," replied Pierre Morin; "let them pass; or, stay, you three had better come with me to the house, and then there will be no mistake. I know that I can depend upon you, Monsieur de Nogent, for assistance in case of need. There may be half a dozen more of these scoundrels up at the chateau, for aught I know."

"I will go with you willingly," replied Ernest, in a tone that left no doubt of his zeal.

But Pierre Morin still waited till he had seen all the archers arrive from the gate; and then choosing out two of the exempts to accompany him, he walked slowly on with Ernest de Nogent and the rest toward the chateau, stopping and looking round him into the

darkness from time to time, as if to see that there was no one lingering about.

"There is something shadowy down there," he said to one of the men, pointing with his hand; "run down and see what it is. We should be better of a torch," he added to another. "Go back and bring that one that is burning on the ground. Do not be afraid!" he whispered in a low voice to Ernest de Nogent, while the two exempts were gone; and after waiting a minute for their return, Ernest thought he heard the sound of distant carriage wheels.

"I wonder who that can be travelling so late at night?" said Pierre Morin aloud, leading the way on towards the chateau. "We commissaries of the police, you know, Monsieur de Nogent, love to know the meaning of everything we hear or see." He paused for a minute or two, then advanced again, then paused once more, and seemed to listen, saying to the exempt who came up at that moment, "Do you not hear the wheels of a carriage?"

"I did a minute ago, sir," replied the exempt; "but it is gone now. Shall I send back and see?"

"No," replied Pierre Morin, "that were useless. If it be gone so far, before you could mount and be after it, all trace would be gone. I shall hear to-morrow; for Michael Brun and Angelo are on the road, and they will give us information."

Thus saying he again walked forward, and in another moment or two they stood in the Ionic portico which we have mentioned, where they found another exempt waiting. Pierre Morin held up his hand, as if to enjoin silence; and then, cautiously lifting the great heavy latch which in those days was attached to almost all the chateaux of France, he opened the door without difficulty, and entered at once. A loud ringing laugh was the first thing that met their ears; then gay and somewhat licentious words; then other signs of merriment; then a health drank and responded to; and then a light and ribald song. Pierre Morin paused and listened, motioning those who accompanied him to keep back. At the end of the first verse of the song, however, he whispered a word to one of the exempts, who took a pistol out of his pocket and advanced towards the door from whence the sounds proceeded. The persons who were busied in such merriment were either by this time so filled with wine, or so occupied with the bottle, that they attended not in the least to what was passing in the rest of the house; and the exempt was enabled to peep through the chink of the door, which was ajar, without being discovered. Returning to the side of Pierre Morin, he informed him that the persons within were two men and three or four women.

"Then you two stay here below," replied Pierre Morin, beckoning the second exempt up from the porch. "You two stay here with one of Monsieur de Nogent's servants. You need not come with me. Follow me, Monsieur de Nogent, with the other two men; we must not want help in case of need; that would not do at all; we cannot tell how many there are up stairs."

He then whispered a word or two to the exempt whom he had first spoken to, and, having done so, led the way up the flight of steps by which, as we have seen, the Baron de Cajare reached the apartment where Annette was confined. Placing a man at each

end of the corridor, Pierre Morin then proceeded to examine every room as he went on, so as to ensure completely that nobody could escape; and accompanied by Ernest de Nogent, whose heart beat with no slight apprehensions, he went on from chamber to chamber till he came to a door at the extreme end of the corridor, which stood open. This was the last door on that side; and speaking aloud, he said, "We must find some one here, at all events; the house cannot be empty."

Empty, however, it proved; for in none of the apartments up stairs was Annette or any of her attendants to be found. From door to door, from room to room, once more Pierre Morin proceeded through the whole house, but it was in vain that he did so; it was in vain that, rousing the people below from their drunken revelry, he demanded again and again what had become of the young lady who had been brought there that morning: they either could not or would not give the slightest information concerning her; and Ernest de Nogent looked in his companion's face with dismay, apprehending a thousand things in a moment, for which there was little or no substantial cause.

For his part, Pierre Morin paused again at the bottom of the stairs, again ordered the chateau to be searched by all the exempts, again cross-questioned the men and women who had been found in the lower part of the house, and then caused all the courts and other detached parts of the building to be examined. But all his efforts proved equally useless, and in the end, consigning the whole party to the care of his officers, he walked slowly back towards the spot where the encounter had taken place between Ernest de Nogent and the Baron de Cajare."

As they went, he seemed to entertain some apprehension that the men might be too much for the exempts, and he consequently sent Ernest's two servants to give them aid. As soon as the latter were gone, he said in a low and significant voice, "Do not be afraid, Monsieur de Nogent; I doubt not that in this confusion the young lady has found an opportunity of making her escape. I am not at all sure that it would have been the best thing for her to go to Versailles, after all."

"The worst, the worst on earth!" cried Ernest.

"Well, then, we need not very much regret that she has got off," replied Pierre Morin. "However, the king will be very angry, and so you will be kind enough not to say that I said so."

Ernest promised to obey this warning; and something in the tone of Pierre Morin induced him to ask, "Will you not tell me more?"

"Really, I have nothing to tell," replied Pierre Morin, in a cool tone. "If you have any information to give, on your part, pray, give it me, Monsieur de Nogent; for I can assure you, that I fear the king's displeasure in this business very much."

He spoke so calmly and decidedly, that Ernest was completely puzzled: but he still ventured to inquire, "Is there nothing that you can permit me to say to Monsieur de Castelnau which may relieve his mind from the anxiety that you know he must feel?"

"Nothing in the least, my dear young gentleman," replied Pierre Morin. "As I have said to yourself, I must say to him, that I have

nothing to tell of any kind, only, that I doubt not, Mademoiselle de St. Morin has made her escape; and, if so, the count will undoubtedly, hear of her soon. However, for the present, I think, it quite as well that none of us should know anything about the matter, for we shall all be questioned very strictly, no doubt; and, for my part, I am glad that I can safely say, I have done my best to find the young lady here, but without success."

Notwithstanding all these assurances, Ernest de Nogent could not divest his mind of the belief that the commissary knew more of the matter than he chose to avow. But as he saw that no further intelligence, of any kind, was to be obtained from him, he only asked, as they came up to the spot where the police were standing with their prisoners, "May I then consider myself at liberty, Monsieur Morin?"

"Oh, certainly," replied Pierre Morin; "I have to apologize for detaining you so long; but it was to assist me, not to restrain you, I can assure you, that I took the liberty of detaining you. Are these your horses? A fine animal that, sir."

Ernest was in no humour to discuss the merits of a horse; and, therefore, as soon as the other prisoners were brought up, and Pierre Morin intimated that he wanted no further assistance, the young gentleman mounted, and pursued his way back towards Paris as fast as possible.

His horse was knocked up before he reached the capital, however; and then being at a place where no other means of advance was to be procured, he was obliged to pause till morning, though certainly he slept not one moment during the weary hours of night that still remained. As soon as it was daylight, and his horse was refreshed, he remounted, and hastened on towards Paris, not quite certain that it would not be best to go on to Versailles; but as a visit to the house of the Count de Castelnau could not delay him for more than half an hour, even should that nobleman not have returned, he determined to turn aside, and proceed to the hotel at the corner of the Rue St. Jacques, where he found everything in such a state of perfect calmness and tranquillity, as to form a strange contrast with the feelings of his own heart. On asking for the count, he was told that he was just up, and about to go to breakfast; and, on entering, he found him sitting at the table, reading, somewhat eagerly, a note which he held in his hand.

"Ah, Monsieur de Nogent!" he exclaimed, as soon as he beheld the young officer, "can you give me any explanation of what this means? Though apparently satisfactory, these words alarm me," and, at the same time, he handed the paper to Ernest. It contained a few words, written in a fair female hand, and was to the following effect:—

"My dear Father and Guardian—I am permitted to write these lines to assure you that I am quite well, safe, and free from all danger and apprehension. I do, this lest other tidings should reach and alarm you, for I have escaped a great and terrible danger: greater, I believe, than I myself clearly comprehend, even now. I trust you may return soon to Castelnau.—Your Annette."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

It was in the palace at Versailles, and in the private cabinet of Louis the Fifteenth, that a party were assembled, comprising almost all the persons whom we have lately seen acting a prominent part in the course of this history. Those who were wanting, indeed, were certainly very important personages in the tale; and amongst them, one of the most so, was Pierre Morin himself. But, on the other hand, there were present, the Duke of Choiseul, the Count de Castelnau, Ernest de Nogent, the Baron de Cajare, and Louis himself; and we shall have occasion to remark, that, in the then existing circumstances, many of these characters acted in a very different manner from that in which we might have supposed they would act, judging by their conduct hitherto. This, however, was not unnatural; for men, in the ordinary intercourse of life, generally feel more or less under restraint from some of the particular prejudices or the conventional rules of society; and it is only when strong passions throw down the barriers, or when negligence suffers small traits to appear, that we discover the true character of those with whom we mingle in the world.

On the present occasion, the king, forgetting his usual calmness and assumption of royal dignity, sat listening, questioning, and replying, with an air of anger and heat which must have been painful to any one who had a real reverence for the royal authority. The Baron de Cajare, casting aside the calm and graceful ease which he generally assumed, was now all eagerness, impetuosity, and rage; while Ernest de Nogent, on the contrary, was calm, self-possessed, grave, and stern; and the Duke of Choiseul, on his part, was evidently heated and irritable, and treated the monarch with less deference than might be considered due to royalty.

"Now, sir, now," said the king, speaking to Ernest de Nogent; "say how you dared to be in the park at Michy two nights ago, as Monsieur de Cajare proves that you were?"

"I knew not, sire," replied Ernest de Nogent, with that tranquil composure which we have already noticed, "that either Michy or its park belonged to your majesty; and I think your majesty will admit at once the cause of my going there was a full and sufficient justification for my being found in those grounds. I had heard, sire, that a young lady, to whom my father is under obligations for very great kindness and attention while he was himself sick and I afar, had been kidnapped from her home by a gross and infamous forgery perpetrated by the most debased and villanous of men, and had been then brought into the neighbourhood of Paris by persons who pretended to be your majesty's police, but who were, in fact, the lowest of all those dark and ready scoundrels who swarm in Paris and every large capital."

While the young officer spoke, the king's cheek had turned extremely red and then pale again; but Ernest had gone on, although

he well knew that this change of colour was more likely to proceed from anger than from shame.

"And what, sir, made you a righter of wrongs?" demanded the king, fiercely. "Who authorised you to seek for and arrest these persons that you speak of? Where is your commission under our hand for thus doing?"

"Sire," replied Ernest, calmly, "I did not seek for these persons to arrest them. With that I had nothing to do; but, I sought to set free a young lady unjustly and scandalously detained against her will, to whom both myself and my father were under obligations. I did it not, I acknowledge, from any considerations of general good. Although I might undoubtedly judge that as the honour of your majesty's government must suffer more or less from such acts being committed, it was the duty of all your subjects to stop them as soon as possible; yet my object, sire, was to do a just and honourable act of friendship, and for that I required no warrant, sire, from any one."

What the king's reply to this bold speech might have been it is impossible to tell, had not the Duke of Choiseul himself interfered, not by any means to discourage his nephew, but, on the contrary, only to press more strongly what he had advanced.

"Your majesty," he said, "is not one to deny that—even had Ernest not been moved by any feelings of personal friendship in this matter—he was not only in the right, but was bound in justice to do as he did; to interfere, and even had it been necessary, to prevent by force of arms, any illegal act which he might see committed contrary to your majesty's honour and the laws of the realm. So say those laws, sire! So say your own ordonnances! You could have punished—nay, I am very sure would have punished him, had he failed in his duty in that respect. Your majesty is angry because he ventured into your royal estate of Michy; but he has, I trust, satisfactorily shown that his so doing proceeded from no disrespect, he being ignorant, as indeed most men are, that your majesty has purchased that estate. I will take care that it shall be better known, sire, for the future. May it not be as well to order the director of the royal domain to place some particular and distinctive mark upon it? But, in the meantime, I am sure your majesty will not only pardon my nephew for having so intruded into the park, but will also thank and reward him for having interfered to free one of your faithful subjects from the hands of such a villanous crew, who, doubtless, by taking the young lady to that place, sought to do an injury to your majesty's honour and character."

The king did not reply, but looked down and bit his lip; and the Duke of Choiseul having said what he thought fit, became silent again, in order to suffer his words to have their full effect. The Baron de Cajare, however, did not permit the silence to remain unbroken; but seeing that the king did not make any answer, he exclaimed, in a harsh tone, "What your majesty may do in vindication of your own honour I cannot tell, but I trust that you will permit me to vindicate mine in the only way open to me."

"Sir," replied Louis, turning upon him sharply, "I am not aware that my honour is at all attacked; I trust that you do not presume to do so."

"Oh! no, sire," said the baron, with an insolent smile, "I have as great a regard for your majesty's honour as for my own; and I beseech you to let me vindicate both in one upon the person of this good gentleman, who insulted me by various acts, in your majesty's park, and you, by being there at all."

Louis paused for a moment or two, as if to consider; but all good feeling and kingly justice was not yet extinct in his bosom, and after a moment he replied, "Silence, sir: you are somewhat insolent. Take care that your own conduct be not inquired into too strictly."

"I humbly beg to say," replied the baron, in a cone of mock humility, "that for this part of my conduct, at least, I can plead a justification, which I think will acquit me before any court in Europe; but I would fain not name it, if it may be otherwise."

As he spoke, he fixed his eyes meaningly on the king, who replied at once, with a heavy frown, "Take care, sir! take care! Now, Monsieur de Nogent, tell me," he continued, "how came you to receive all this excellent information, and whence did it come?"

"Principally from my father, sire," replied Ernest: "he was at Castelnau when the young lady was persuaded to leave her home by a forged letter from her guardian. He it was who told me the greater part of the events which I have now communicated to your majesty, and on which I then acted."

Louis was now beginning to feel—not, indeed, from anything that Ernest de Nogent had said, but rather from the words of the Baron de Cajare—that he could not investigate more minutely that which had taken place, without at once boldly avowing the part which he himself had played in the whole transaction. Had that transaction proved successful, he would have had no hesitation in regard to the avowal; but as it was, he did not feel inclined to acknowledge that such acts had been perpetrated by his command. He paused and hesitated, therefore, not with any purpose of abandoning the pursuit in which he had engaged, for, to speak the truth, opposition and disappointment had, as usual, only made him the more eager, but rather with a view of considering the next step, in order to remove the unexpected obstacles which were cast in his way.

"Your explanation, sir," he continued, addressing Ernest, "is in some degree satisfactory. Of course you now know where the young lady is, from the report made to me by my lieutenant-general of police shows that she was not to be found in the chateau when his agents searched it."

"I was with them the whole time, may it please your majesty," replied Ernest; "I was never absent from them a moment; and the house was certainly searched in the strictest and most rigorous manner, without the slightest trace being discovered of where the young lady was. I should have felt inclined to suppose, indeed, that she had never been there, had not the people we found in the place acknowledged that she had. They said, moreover, that nobody had been there but Monsieur de Cajare: so that it is to be presumed her escape was effected while he was attacking me in the park."

Ernest's words produced a different effect from that which he

had intended. He himself had not the slightest suspicion that the Baron de Cajare either knew where *Ann^{ette}* now was, or had taken any share in her flight; nor did he at all intend to instil such suspicions into the mind of the king. Louis, however, seized them at once, and asked, "Did she escape, *Monsieur de Nogent*? that is the question; did she escape? *Monsieur de Cajare* was the last person that saw her then? From you, sir, we shall require an account of her," he added, turning to the baron."

"Sire, you do me injustice," said the Baron de Cajare; "I saw her certainly, but only for the purpose of executing the orders I had received —"

"Silence, sir," cried the king; "silence! Let me hear not one word from you, but in answer to the questions I address to you. *Monsieur de Nogent*, ask the page at the door if the fresh report which I have required from the lieutenant-general be ready. Now *Monsieur le Comte de Castelneau*," the monarch continued, whilst Ernest left the room for a moment, "you will be good enough to inform me whether you yourself do or do not know where this young lady is? You see that a serious charge is likely to gather together against *Monsieur de Cajare*, and I require a positive and distinct answer to the question I have put."

"Most distinctly then and positively," replied the count, calmly, "I have not the slightest or most distant idea of where *Mademoiselle de St. Morin* is, or what is become of her."

"This is all very strange, I must say," replied the king; "and, as I said before, I shall look to the Baron de Cajare for further information."

"In fact, sire," replied the baron, "those who serve your majesty best are to be the most severely dealt with."

"You hear, *Monsieur de Choiseul*?" said the king.

"I do, sire," replied the duke; "and I think I understand your majesty's intentions, too."

"Stay!" said the king, "stay! We may find something more here, either to exculpate or to condemn this gentleman. While he was speaking, Ernest re-entered the cabinet, bearing a packet in his hand, which he delivered to the king, who tore open the seals hastily, and looked over the contents. As he did so, his brow gathered heavily together, and he read the paper aloud as follows: "The deposition of *Maitre Pierre Jean*, taken in the royal prison of the Chatelet, this 24th of September, 17—. That the said *Pierre Jean* did accompany the Baron de Cajare, and so forth; that the said *Pierre Jean*, on finding that the Baron de Cajare had gone up to the room in which *Mademoiselle de St. Morin* was confined, did follow him quietly; and going round by the back corridor to the other door of the chamber, listened attentively to all the conversation that took place, and heard distinctly the said baron tell *Mademoiselle de St. Morin* that he had come there for the purpose of delivering her from the hands into which she had fallen—"

"I think that this is quite enough," said the king. "Call the page, *Monsieur de Nogent*; send a guard in here directly. *Monsieur le Baron*, when you think fit, by a letter addressed to us, and marked private, to make known where this young lady is, your case shall have due consideration. Offer no reply, sir, but retire

into the ante-chamber, and wait there while Monsieur de Choiseul makes out an order for your committal to the Bastile."

The baron bowed his head and retired; nor did he make the slightest attempt to escape, though there was no one in the ante-room when he entered it; for such was the strange sort of prestige attached in those days to the idea of the royal power in France, that an order, such as that which had just been pronounced by the lips of the sovereign himself, seemed to paralyse all those faculties which might otherwise have been used effectually for the purposes of flight.

Although the weight of the king's indignation—perhaps pointed by some degree of apprehension lest his secrets should be betrayed by his emissary—had thus fallen upon the Baron de Cajare, there were none of the persons who then stood before him towards whom Louis felt any very kindly feelings. Even the Duke of Choiseul, who possessed his affection, if ever any one did so, had now given him bitter offence, which was not forgotten in many an after-day, which was called to mind when other causes for anger arose between the king and the favourite minister.

For a moment or two after the Baron de Cajare had retired, Louis continued gazing upon the floor, and biting his pale lip; while the Duke of Choiseul, kneeling upon one of the cushions, wrote the *lettre de cachet* for the king's signature. When the document was completed, signed, and countersigned, Louis rose, and addressing the count, he said, "You will, sir, after spending this day in Paris—which I give you for the arrangement of your affairs—you will, sir, immediately return to Versailles, and not quit that town for more than five leagues distance, till you receive my permission so to do. Monsieur de Nogent, your leave of absence was given you for the purpose of visiting your father. You had better proceed into Quercy at once. Monsieur de Choiseul, I have to speak to you further, and in private, upon affairs of more importance than these."

Thus saying, he bowed his head, and the count and his young friend retired from the presence of the king.

CHAPTER XXIX.

We must now return to one in whom our affections are engaged, and whom we have left somewhat too long already. We have seen the feelings with which Annette de St. Morin heard the Baron de Cajare calling in familiar terms to the man who had been the chief instrument in deceiving her into a situation of pain and difficulty. It is an old and common observation, that courage sometimes springs from despair; and although, from the moment that her false arrest had taken place, she had never yet dreamt of making her escape from a power she knew to be too vigilant and active for any such simple art as hers to elude, yet she now contemplated such an escape, not only as most desirable, but as possible, convinced that she had been deceived, and trusting to receive support and assistance from the real police of the realm, if she could once free

herself from the hands of those who so unjustly detained her. Unaccustomed, however, to act in circumstances of sudden emergency, with nothing to guide her but her own natural good sense, with no knowledge of the spot in which she was, and no experience of the world in which she was about to move, it was very natural that Annette should hesitate with alarm and agitation when she contemplated going forth alone and unprotected into a world where all was strange, and fearful to her imagination.

"Donnine," she said, "we must endeavour to make our escape! That man is deceiving us; we cannot trust to him. If we could but get to Paris, and find my guardian's house, we should be in safety."

"Oh! of course," replied Donnine; "of course we should be in safety there; but do you know where we are, dear lady, and which is the way to Paris?"

Annette paused and thought, and then clasped her hands as if in despair. The moment after, however, she said, "Well, Donnine, well, gather together what smaller articles we can carry. I feel certain, from what I have seen and heard, that it will be better to wander through the fields all night than remain in this place. Make haste, Donnine! Make haste, good Donnine, or they will be back before we can make our escape. Hark! I hear voices below," and running to one of the windows, she gazed out. She there saw a number of persons, bearing torches, issue forth from the portico, upon the little terrace before the chateau; and she repeated—

"Quick, quick, Donnine! they are all going out to seek the people that he said were lingering in the park. We may perhaps escape while they are so engaged."

Donnine shook her head, as if she doubted very much that her young mistress's plan would succeed; but she obeyed the orders which she had received, and with Annette's maid and the old man-servant, Joachin, who was called in to assist, proceeded to gather together all the things which had been brought in thither from the carriage on their arrival. Annette, herself, gave what aid she could, and was endeavouring to select those objects that seemed most needful from the mass, when the sudden rising of the latch of the lock startled her, and she gazed up with a look of consternation and surprise.

Her astonishment was not diminished by what she beheld: for advancing towards her from the door with a quick step and a look of eagerness and anxiety, was a lady dressed in deep mourning, and at first Annette, though she remembered the countenance as one she had seen somewhere before, could not attach to it any definite idea of the where and the when, and the how she had first become acquainted with it. The next moment, however, there rose up before her mind, as if by magic, the whole scene of the little fountain and the cross, in the wood near Castelnau, and of the lady that she had there so strangely met; and a light like that of hope beamed upon her from the past, as she became convinced that the same person again stood before her.

The lady advanced direct towards her, and again, as before, threw her arms around her, and held her to her heart with tears in her eyes. It was but for a moment, however, that she now gave

way; for the minute after she exclaimed, "Quick, my beloved child! I come to rescue you, Annette! But there is not an instant to lose, for we cannot count upon five minutes as our own. Take merely what is absolutely necessary, and leave the rest—any loss is better than the loss of time at this moment!"

As she spoke, her eyes ran over all the packages which good Donnine and the rest had been busily gathering together; but she still held Annette by the hand, drawing her gently towards the door. Donnine looked up and gazed in the lady's face for a moment, then made her a lowly courtesy, asking, "What shall I take, madam?"

"What is absolutely necessary, and nothing more," replied the lady, hurriedly. "Come, sweet child! come! Come, all of you, as fast but as silently as possible;" and while Donnine snatched up hastily various packages, which, as usual, on such occasions, were the things of all others that were not wanted, she led Annette on into the adjoining chamber, and the servants followed one by one. In the ante-room, the lady paused for a moment to enjoin silence once more, and to beg those who followed to keep together. She then, however, instead of turning to the door which led out into the great corridor, directed her steps towards a smaller door on the left-hand side, which neither Annette nor her servants had yet had time to examine.

The lady opened it cautiously, and looked out, and Annette beheld the top of a small back staircase, constructed apparently for the passage of servants to and fro. No lamp nor candle was to be seen, but a faint light came up from below; and the lady, leaning over the railing, inquired, in a low voice, "Are you there, Gaultier?"

"Yes, madam," replied some one from the bottom of the steps; and the lady exclaiming, "Come, Annette, come," held out her hand to lead her down.

She felt that poor Annette trembled with anxiety and agitation; and she said, lowering her voice again, "Fear not, my dear child, fear not; there is scarcely a possibility of our being stopped. We are strongly supported, and have those to befriend us who can befriend us well."

Annette assured her that she did not fear; and she said true, for it was not exactly fear that she felt. Agitation she certainly did experience, and that in no slight degree; but it was more of a joyful than a painful character: it was that eagerness of a new-raised hope and expectation, which sometimes performs the part of fear, in making the heart flutter, and the limbs tremble.

Following lightly down the stairs, then, she kept close to her fair guide, while the servants came after, gazing round them at every step, with looks of apprehension and wonder. They saw evidently that their mistress had some previous acquaintance with the lady who had thus strangely visited her, and the *soubrette*, who was accustomed to examine the books of *Madame Donnine*, almost as much as those of her actual mistress, thought that she perceived a look of intelligence in the good housekeeper's countenance, which she would have given half her little fortune to fathom.

All was quiet and solitary also, till they reached the second flight of steps, but there, a man was found waiting, well armed, and

holding a lamp in his hand, which he raised high above his head, in order to light the party who were descending. On reaching the bottom of the staircase, a long, dark passage was seen, stretching on one side to the right, and on the other to the left. In the latter direction it seemed to be terminated by a door, at which stood another armed man, who remained motionless, though his eyes were turned in the direction of those who were coming down from above. The lady beckoned him forward, as soon as her foot touched the pavement, and asked him a question in a low tone, which he repeated a little louder, saying, "It is locked, madam, and bolted, too."

"Come, then," she said, "come quick. Are they all here?"

As she spoke, she gave a glance at the party assembled at the foot of the stairs, and then again hurried on, leading Annette by the hand.

It may seem strange to the reader that, however simple and inexperienced Annette de St. Morin might be, she could go with the most perfect tranquillity and confidence with a person whom she had only seen once before, and who afforded no explanation whatsoever of her views, purposes, or character. So it was, however: Annette had not the slightest doubt; she accompanied that lady as confidently as if she had known her for many long years; she felt sure she was leading her aright; she entertained not a doubt that she was interested to save her from the evil hands into which she had fallen. What were the sensations that produced such confidence; I cannot say; but certain it is that it existed.

She went on, then, as readily and willingly as if the whole had been explained; and passing on through several passages communicating with the different offices of the building, but without meeting with one single living soul, except the two armed men whom we have mentioned, the fugitives at length arrived at a door which was open, and through which Annette felt streaming, the cool breeze of an autumnal night. That air, and the sensation of freedom which it brought with it, produced the sweetest of all reliefs to Annette's heart. It was the sensation of liberty, it was the pulse of freedom, it was the breaking the bonds from off the heart. She now knew, even more than before, how much she had suffered, how heavy had been the weight upon her during the last three or four days; for now that it was removed, she felt that she could weep, and tears did rise in her eyes, notwithstanding all she could do to restrain them.

Issuing forth from the chateau by a small back door, they found themselves in what is called the *basse cour*. No one was there, but the gate on the other side was again held open for them by an armed man, who followed them as they passed through; and taking their way across another little court, they came into a field, across which there was a path. It was evident that they were still in the grounds of the chateau, however, for Annette could see the outline of a wall bordering the meadow, and she did not feel herself secure so long as she remained within those dangerous precincts. The night was so dark that she could not distinguish anything but the mere wall till they had well nigh crossed the open space; but at length, with joy and satisfaction indescribable, she beheld a small gate in the enclosure, which they found open, and in an instant

the whole party were in the ~~by road~~ leading from Puiset to Fontainebleau.

It is true, Annette had no idea of where she was; but it was clear that she was now free, and she did weep right heartily. Not twenty yards from the gate stood a carriage, with a coachman and two other men on foot holding some horses, and towards the coach the lady led her tenderly forward, whispering, "You are safe, dear child! You are safe!"

Everything now passed easily and rapidly: Annette took her place in the vehicle, the lady seated herself by her side; the two women servants also found room, and the men occupied a place on the outside. The armed servants who had come with the lady herself, mounted the horses which were standing near, and without any word being given, as soon as the door was closed, the carriage began to move forward at as rapid a rate as the nature of the road would permit.

Annette was still weeping; but she felt the arm of her fair companion cast round her, and her hand pressed tenderly in that soft hand which had guided her from the dangerous abode in which she had been placed, while the sweet melancholy voice of her who had taken so strange an interest in her fate whispered tenderly, anxiously, in her ear, "You are safe, dear Annette; you are safe. It is for this moment that I have lived so long."

There might be a thousand things that Annette would have liked to ask; there might be a thousand hopes, and anxieties, and expectations, which required satisfaction; but she felt it was not a moment to make inquiries of any kind, especially as she was not alone with the lady who had set her free.

For more than two hours the carriage rolled on rapidly, and then came a momentary pause while fresh horses were put on, after which it began to move forward at the same pace, and did not stop for nearly three hours more. Again the horses were changed, and again for an hour and a half they proceeded on their way, till at length, by some faint streaks of light that began to appear in the eastern sky, Annette perceived a long avenue of trees, a river, and a chateau at some short distance. In ten minutes more they drove into the court of the mansion itself. The whole household seemed to be up and watching. The great doors at the top of a flight of steps were thrown open, and a blaze of cheerful light came forth from the vestibule. The lady led Annette on by the hand up those steps, and through the hall, into a large and magnificent saloon, where some light refreshments were laid out.

The walls of the room were wainscotted with black oak, without any other ornament whatsoever, except the rich carving of the cornices and mouldings; but in the centre of one of the panels was a small portrait in a thick, heavy frame. To it the lady led up Annette at once, and without a word pointed to the picture with her hand. It was beautifully executed, and represented a gentleman in a military dress in the act of mounting his horse. He seemed to be taking leave of some one, and looked full into the room, while his left hand was represented gracefully waving his hat and plume with an expression of joy and buoyant happiness which it is difficult to describe.

As soon as she saw it, Annette put her hand to her brow, exclaiming, "I have seen that before; I have seen that before at Castelneau! I have seen it, and know it well; for I have looked at it for many an hour. Oh, what a countenance! Oh, what a look!"

The lady cast her arms around her, bent down her head upon Annette's shoulder, and wept bitterly. Whether it was the sympathy with grief that is in every fine and affectionate human heart; or some of those many latent causes, those fine and mysterious links between being and being which never have been, and perhaps never will be, explained, which set idle metaphysics altogether at fault, and tell us, perhaps, as much as we can ever know in this world of the workings of the immaterial spirit within us, and of its communion with other spirits—whether it proceeded from any of these causes, from sources more deep and inexplicable still, or from others more plain and apparent, I cannot tell, but Annette saw not the grief of the lady unmoved, looked not upon that picture without strong emotion herself, and giving way to all she felt, she too bowed down her head and mingled her tears with those of her companion.

They were not allowed a long space of time to indulge in such emotions; for one of the servants who had accompanied the carriage entered the room the moment after, and approaching the lady with a respectful air, whispered a few words to her in a low voice.

The lady started, and put her hand to her brow. "Indeed!" she said, "indeed! How far did he come?"

"Half way through the second stage, madam," replied the servant.

"That is unfortunate," said the lady; "most unfortunate. Dearest Annette, we have not yet found repose; but, at all events, we are a long way in advance, and we will not suffer them to succeed, no, not if we should quit France. Ask no questions, my sweet child, but take some refreshment, then three hours of repose, and then let us onward to whatever fate may lie before us."

CHAPTER XXX.

WE must now for a time return to the chateau of Michy, to the back staircase and small passages through which Annette took her way in making her escape. Those passages, as we have said, were deserted by every one as she went through them; not a human being presented itself; for the door which led to the kitchen of the chateau, an important and busy quarter of a French house, was that which we have seen guarded with so much care, and which the servant pronounced to be locked when he quitted it. The other offices past which Annette's course was directed were merely sculleries, pantries, larders, and places of a similar description; and all was silent and dull as the grave, as long as the lady and her companions were on their way through them. The moment, however, that they were gone, from underneath a sort of table or dresser in one of the sculleries, crept out a small but well-

formed boy, apparently not more than eight or nine years of age, but in reality considerably past his fourteenth year. He was dressed in the greasy and lowly garb of a *marmiton*, the lowest of all the culinary offices of a French house; but there was an air of shrewd and malicious penetration in the boy's eyes which spoke a spirit well calculated to succeed in other and more dangerous employments than the somewhat warm but innocent occupations of the kitchen.

The moment that he came forth he burst into a low, disagreeable, half-suppressed laugh; then looked sharply and keenly round him as if afraid that somebody might be lingering near to mark his merriment. That glance, however, satisfied him that he was alone, and then he chuckled again and spoke to himself, seeming to enjoy the business in which he was engaged very highly. "Ha, ha, ha!" he said, "they shall see who will be *marmiton* much longer. Yon great, greasy-livered cook shall beat me no more with his ladle as if I were a turnspit dog. Not he! forsooth, not he. Nor that great wild bully Merlton kick me along the passage like a ball. Ay! if I was such a fool as my companion Jonah now, I should go and tell those scavengers of court filth what I have seen; but I am no such ass as that. I'll put my money in my own sack, and soon see where they carry yon pretty piece of pastry. The king will give a rare sum for tidings of her journey; and while they are all drinking and quarrelling together and letting her escape, I will make free with the horses in the stable, and away after her to give notice of her course—trust me for dodging the hare back to her form."

Thus saying, the *marmiton*, with another of his low disagreeable laughs, crept quietly out by the same door through which Annette had made her exit, and looked shrewdly through the darkness after her and her companions.

The path which they followed was, like every other path on earth, winding and tortuous. We have something of the serpent in us all, which, alas! never allows us to go straight forward to our object, even if it be from one corner of a field to another. The *marmiton*, however, who knew the windings of the path by old experience, took a shorter way through the grass; and as soon as he had seen Annette and her companions safely in the coach, he sprang with a light bound on the top of the wall, indulging in one of his frequent chuckles, which it seems called the attention of the principal servant who attended the carriage. Running along with the agility of a squirrel upon the eminence which he had attained, the boy almost kept pace with the vehicle that bore Annette till he reached the end of the wall, where there appeared a low building with a little court and a gate leading out upon the road. This building was, in fact, a stable in which the gentry, whom we have seen revelling at the chateau, kept the horses which served to carry them to and fro upon their various discreditable expeditions. One of these horses was soon brought forth by the boy, saddled and equipped, and although the stirrups could not be brought up sufficiently to suit the shortness of his legs, yet he contrived to make himself a good seat by thrusting his feet into the leathers, and thus sallied forth in pursuit of the carriage.

For thirty miles he kept up with it well, his weight being so light as in no degree to fatigue the horse. The vehicle was now making its way towards the Beauvoisis, having left Paris on one side, and following the direction of Chantilly and Clermont, and the boy was obliged to slacken his pace, though not to abandon the pursuit. He kept the coach in view, indeed, till it reached the last place where it changed horses, and there suffering it to go on while he himself paused to give his own charger some sort of refreshment, he made many ingenious inquiries as to the direction which the carriage had taken, and who was the proprietor thereof. He soon discovered or suspected that the two horse-boys, who were the only persons up, had been instructed to mislead him; and, indeed, there was a jocular sort of wink of the eye while they answered his question, which might well create such an impression. The name that they gave in reply to his inquiries was evidently a false one, and certainly did not deceive him; and the direction they told him the carriage was about to take, he concluded might be wrong also, though he did not feel quite so sure of that. Shrewd beyond his years, and experienced in every minor sort of trickery, he watched, as well as he could by the dim light, the countenances of those with whom he spoke. He judged, and judged rightly, that they suspected him of reading their replies the reverse way, and he imagined that they might therefore tell him what was right in one particular in order to cheat him the more surely. He resolved, therefore, to be upon his guard; and though he went on fast wherever there were no carriage paths to the right or left, he stopped at each turning, and examined accurately whether fresh traces of wheels and horses' feet were to be discovered. Thus he pursued his plan successfully, and did not again stop till he had traced the vehicle into the gates of the chateau where we have seen Annette take refuge.

In the village opposite to the gates of that building, he paused for two or three hours in order to refresh his horse, and there, by inquiries, he easily ascertained what was the name of the mansion. Satisfied with this information, he rode slowly back on the way to Versailles, and presenting himself at the palace, demanded boldly to speak with the king.

The Swiss to whom he addressed himself laughed him to scorn, saying, "Get away, you greasy rascallion; do you think the king speaks with such dirty young vagabonds as you are? ~~Why~~ he would not get the smell of pots and kettles out of his nose for a month. Get away, get away, I tell you. I would make my cane fly about your shoulders, if I were not afraid that it would get befouled by such a dirty acquaintance."

The boy was not a little disappointed, but, nevertheless, he was not driven to despair. Being determined to gain his point, perfectly unscrupulous as to means, and seeing what was the obstacle which lay in his way, he took himself back to Paris without delay, and there prepared to supply the means which were wanting, by the unceremonious sale of the horse which he had borrowed from the stables at Michy.

In the good city of Paris, rogues of all kinds, sorts, and descriptions abound, and ever have abounded. The harvest of such gentry,

then, was not at all deficient at the time I speak of; and amongst the rest, buyers of stolen goods were never found wanting to persons who had such articles to dispose of. The horse of the *marmiteur* was at once judged, by the man to whom he offered it, to be that sort of merchandize which, being somewhat dangerous to the traffickers therein, may be bought and sold very much below its real value. It was somewhat knocked up also: the saddle and bridle, however, were in excellent condition, and the chapman, being rather honest than otherwise, absolutely gave the boy one-fifth of what the whole was worth. "With this sum, which was to him immense, our *marmiteur* proceeded to the shop of a *fripier*, where, without difficulty, he obtained for himself a very smart suit which had once belonged to one of the royal pages of honour, who had outgrown it, and transmitted it to his father's valet, who sent it to the abode where the *marmiteur* found it. The boy had sold the horse at so great a loss, both because he did not dare drive a hard bargain about stolen goods, and because he was utterly ignorant of the value of the article he had to dispose of; but he was very nearly a match for the *fripier*, whose commodities were much more in his own line, and he obtained the clothes really not too dear. The worthy old clothesman added also a piece of advice which was somewhat useful to the *marmiteur*.

"Be advised, my good boy," he said, "and before you put on that suit, wash your face and hands, or your dirty face and your clean coat will make the people believe that you have stolen either the one or the other, and it cannot very well be your own countenance."

"Well," said the boy, "I'll wash myself, if I can get water, for I am going to the king, and one must not go with dirty hands."

"Going to the king, you dirty shrimp?" exclaimed the *fripier*; "what mean you by going to the king? The king will have nothing to say to such a turnspit dog as you!"

"You are mistaken there, though, Master Threadbare," replied the *marmiteur*; "the king will have a great deal to say to me, for I have got a great deal to say to him that he will give half a province to hear, if I judge right."

"A secret," said the *fripier*, beginning to be more interested; "pray what is that, my boy?"

The boy laughed in his face, replying, "You must think me soft enough; but if you want to tell my secret to the king before me, tell him that he has more rogues in Paris than he knows of, and put yourself at the head of the list. Ha, ha, ha!"

He was quitting the shop with a shout of laughter, but the *fripier* was one of those who, having really a genius as well as a passion for intrigue of all kinds, was immediately interested in the boy, both on account of the nature of his enterprise, and the talent which he showed for that sort of undertaking.

"Stay, my lad, stay," he cried: "do not be too hasty. I will give you some advice, if you stop but for a moment, which shall cost you nothing if it does not succeed, and which, if you really have a secret worth anything, may make your fortune."

"Ay?" said the boy, pausing to listen; "tell me what that may be."

"Come hither," said the man, "and attend to what I have to say. You can never get speech of the king unless you have somebody to introduce you to him; now, I will get you such an introduction, if you will give me a couple of louis for *douceur*."

"How can you do that any more than myself?" replied the boy. "You are but a cleaner of used clothes, and I a cleaner of used plates. There is not much difference between us, for that matter; and I am not going to commit the sin of paying two louis for what God gives freely."

"And what is that?" cried the *fripier*. "What is that, my young riddler?"

"Why, empty air," replied the boy: "fine words, I mean, Master Threadbare; fat promises, and thin performances. No, no, I will pay nothing for that."

"Heaven forbid that you should," answered the *fripier*. "Why, lad, you are as suspicious as a rat-catcher's dog; but I'll show in a minute how I can do all that I promise to do. Tell me, my lad—you seem to know something of the court—who is the king's *valet de chambre*? Can you say?"

"Ay, that I can, well," replied the boy. "Many a cuff has Master Lebel given me in his day."

"Right, boy, right," replied the *fripier*, judging from the boy's instant answer that he was in reality acquainted with the court. "Well, then, look at this letter, if you can read, and see whose name is signed at the bottom."

The boy took the letter, and read it through. "Ha, ha!" he said; "he is coming to you to-night, and wants a hundred louis: I understand you now. You would have me tell my secret to him: is that it?"

"No," answered the *fripier*; "no, no, my boy; I see you are too shrewd for that; nor would I ever advise it. Master Lebel is one of those who will never let any one benefit by anything whereby he can benefit himself. No, but he may bring you to the presence of the king, if you really have a secret worth telling."

"Ha, ha! this is something like, now," replied the boy. "Come, Master Fripier, you are likely to win your two louis; but we must about the business speedily, or some one may step in before us."

"You see," replied the *fripier*, "that he marks seven o'clock as the hour when he is to be here; so, my boy, we can do nothing before that. Come to me at that hour, and I will introduce you to him; and then, if you do not manage matters, it is your fault, not mine."

"Right," replied the boy. "I won't miss my mark, depend upon it, but be here at seven exactly; so now fare you well, good friend."

"One more word before you go," replied the *fripier*, "which is a word of good counsel, too, my lad, and no offence in life to a young gentleman of honour, who is seeking to make his way in the world."

"What is it?" said the boy. "What is it?"

"Only this," answered the *fripier*, "if you should by any chance have stolen the money as well as the secret, you had better keep yourself quite quiet and out of sight for the rest of the day. There is a good inn, not far off, round that corner there, where people lie snug occasionally."

"Oh! I never steal anything," answered the boy, "but I am tired, and going to sleep, so I shall be quiet enough. Good-bye, good-bye," and away he went.

At the hour of seven, in the grey light, which, at that time of day and season of the year, pervaded the inner recesses of a Parisian shop, especially when it was situated in the far depths of the city, where house piled upon house, and lane jostling alley, cut off great part of the rays even of the meridian sun—there sat together the *fripier* and the *valet de chambre* of the king, who, though calling himself, on all occasions, a gentleman (heaven defend us!) did not scruple to frequent such places as those in which we now find him. He might be seen, at many times, when the daylight was somewhat dim, entering many a low shop, prying into many a poor abode, and sometimes sojourning long therein, either upon his master's account or his own.

His views and occupations on many of these occasions we will not offend the reader by inquiring into; suffice it to notice the personal business which now led him to the dwelling of the *fripier*. With him, as with many others in his situation, though he derived large sums from the vices and follies of those upon whom he was dependent, the contract with their corruption induced habits of expense, which often left him poor in the midst of opulence. When he saw a king, beggared in finances, unscrupulously pillage his subjects to supply materials for his own gratifications, no one can wonder that he was inclined to pillage his king for the same purposes. Thus Master Lebel often laid his hand upon perquisites, his rights to which were more than doubtful, and often sent to the abode of our good friend the *fripier*, articles which might have long appeared upon the king's person, or ornamented Versailles, had he not discovered some flaw, which, in his opinion, rendered them unworthy of the royal touch. Sometimes, also, he was obliged to anticipate such resources; and calculating that garments, still new, would wear with time, and must find their way into his hands, he would sell the monarch's robes upon his back, and thus extract some gold from the close purse of the serviceable friend with whom he was now conversing.

The *fripier* had told him of his adventure with the boy, and Lebel had just laughed with a scornful sneer, at such a person as the other described, having anything worthy of the king's ear, when the *marmiton* himself appeared, dressed in his new plumage, and looking, to say sooth, both smart and graceful, though still, of course, very diminutive in size, the new clothes having expanded his heart, without enlarging his person.

"Good even, Monsieur Lebel," he said. "Good even to your worship. I dare to say this good gentleman has told you that I want speech of his majesty."

The *valet de chambre* stared at the boy, with as scrutinizing a glance as the state of the light in the shop would admit, and remained a moment or two gazing upon him intently, as if for the purpose of confusing and abashing him. But the *marmiton* was not so easily put out of countenance, and he was, moreover, impressed with a great idea of his own importance; an idea which, certainly, when it is sufficiently fixed and strong, carries us through innu-

merable difficulties and dangers, in which our boat would founder, without the aid of that buoyant, cork-like quality, called self-conceit.

"Well, Master Lebel," said the *marmiton* at length, "you seem in a contemplative mood this evening. Pray, let me know when you have done, and give me an answer whether you will bring me to speech of the king, or shall I apply to another?"

"Bring you to speech of the king!" exclaimed Lebel. "You saucy Jack Snipe, I will bring you to acquaintance with a horse-whip. Why your face, though you have scrubbed it, is as clear upon my recollection, covered with grease and smoke, as if I had beheld it yesterday."

"Then where did you behold it?" demanded the boy, saucily. "If you have seen it, you can, doubtless, tell where."

"Do you think I recollect, by the mark, every brass pot I meet with?" rejoined Lebel. "But we will soon bring down your impudence, good youth. I pray thee, Monsieur Vingtun, send for an archer from the police bureau. Depend upon it, this boy has stolen money to buy his fine clothes. We must have him to the Chatelet. Do not let him get away."

"Oh, no fear! no fear!" answered the boy, whose courage and impudence had risen rather than decreased by food, rest, and reflection. "No fear of my going, Master Lebel. Here I sit, send for whom you will. Only remember, that I tell you I have something to say to the king which he would give half a province to hear; and as he must know the whole matter sooner or later, you can judge whether he will be well pleased to find that you have kept the tidings from him till perhaps it may be too late, and have also maltreated the messenger. Now send for all the archers in France if you will, I care not. They will bring me to the presence of the king, if you do not."

There was something so cool and satisfied in the boy's whole tone and manner, that it was evident he at least thought his secret of import; and there was also something so shrewd and clever in his looks and words, that Lebel inferred he was not likely to make a bad guess of what the king would like to hear. Now the *valet de chambre* would have given half a pound of the best snuff that he ever took from a royal canister—and that for him would have been a considerable sacrifice—to learn the boy's secret, for the purpose of knowing whether it was really worth retailing, and of making use of it for his own purposes; but the boy was evidently impenetrable; and as the next best thing, Lebel continued to stare in his face, for the purpose of ascertaining where he had seen him before, a fact which had utterly escaped from his memory, though he was quite sure that the boy's face had met his eyes many a time.

At length a sudden light seemed to strike him. "Ha!" he exclaimed: "now I recollect! You are the little villain of a *marmiton* who put sugar into my basin of soup, the other day at Michy."

"The same, Monsieur Lebel! the same!" replied the *marmiton*; "and the same whose ears you boxed for so doing."

"Now I begin to see the whole matter," said Lebel, thoughtfully. "So, I know your business now."

"Ay?" said the boy, somewhat apprehensive that his secret

might have escaped by some other channel: "how so, I pray you, Monsieur Lebel?"

"Why, simply this," replied the valet, "that the young lady,—I mean the last that was brought to Michy—has been carried off from that place."

"Phoo!" cried the boy, "you know nothing about it!"

"I know as much as the king," replied the *valet de chambre*; "and, moreover, there has been a sad to-do about it this very morning at Versailles."

"Well," answered the boy, in a more important tone than ever; "it is in order to make the king know more than either he or you know, that I want to see him. If you bring me to him, I will tell how the whole happened, every step the girl took, where she went to, and where she now is."

"If you tell that, your fortune is made," cried Lebel. "Come with me! come with me! and you shall be Monsieur Marmiton for the rest of your life?"

CHAPTER XXXI.

WHEN Lebel and the *marmiton* arrived at Versailles, it was found that the king was occupied, and no one dared to disturb him for the time. The audience, therefore, which the boy solicited was of necessity delayed till the following morning, and during the course of the whole evening he was subjected to an ordeal, after which he might have been considered as well qualified for admission into any diplomatic cabinet in Europe. The court of Savoy itself could not have produced any one shrewder or more skilful at detecting and parrying every subtle contrivance of an enemy, than the *marmiton* proved himself to be in his conversation with Lebel. The latter left no means untried, either by a quiet jest, a sly question upon something apparently totally unconnected with the subject, a trap within a trap, which he fancied it entirely impossible that the boy could discover, or, in short, any other art whatsoever which the wit of man could devise to worm out of the boy his secret, for the purpose of making use of it himself. To his surprise, however, he found, that in this sort of mental fencing, the boy took as much delight as he did himself, or even more, for when he, frustrated at every point, suffered the subject to drop for a moment, the lad with a degree of malicious fun would cunningly lead the conversation back towards the same topic, and engage the disappointed valet in new efforts, which were frustrated as before. The next object of Lebel was, to prevent the boy holding any communication with the other personages of the royal household, and he therefore kept him in his rooms all night, under strong apprehensions lest any one should get hold of him, and bring him without his participation to the royal ear.

As early the next morning as possible, the fact of the boy's presence at Versailles was notified to the king, and he was admitted to the royal chamber while Louis was dressing. He stood in one corner of the room, while all the pompous foolery took place which,

by that time, had become a rule of state at the rising of a French monarch. Every gentleman who had a claim to hand to the king any part of his wardrobe was there present, the one giving Louis his shirt, another his waistcoat, another his stockings, and the whole of the undignified process being gone through with an air of solemn gravity as if it had been an execution. The various nobles gazed at the boy, from time to time, as he stood in the corner, wondering what brought him there, and sometimes, misled by his gay apparel into a belief that he was a person of consequence, experiencing sensations of jealousy and apprehension lest this new claimant should take from them a part of the royal favours.

As soon as Louis was up, and, by the different arts and appliances of the day, had been made to look somewhat more king-like and youthful than he did at first, he turned towards a small cabinet which lay to the right of his bed-room, and making a sign to the boy, he said, "Come hither, come hither; Lebel, bring him hither. Give me a robe de chambre."

He addressed one of the gentlemen who stood nearest to him, and who immediately took up a dressing-gown which lay at hand, and offered it to the monarch. At that very instant, however, another nobleman laid his hand upon the arm of the first, and insisted that it was his right to hand the dressing-gown. The first replied that the king had spoken to him. The one claimed by the king's immediate command, the other by his ancient right, and for several minutes the king was kept waiting; till at length he was obliged to decide the dispute himself, and of course gave his judgment in favour of etiquette. The person whose privilege it was handed him the dressing-gown, but the king, somewhat cold, and very impatient, forbade him to assist in putting it on, and conferred that honour upon the other. He then retired into the cabinet, followed by Lebel and the boy, and remained there for half an hour, with the door closed upon the whole party of attendant nobles.

The conversation which took place between the monarch, the *valet de chambre*, and the *marmiton*, on every account had better not be transcribed, for it is well known that in his communications with the pitiful minions who surrounded him, and the vile instruments of his pleasure, Louis forgot both what was due to his character as a gentleman and his character as a king. The result, however, was, that at the end of the half hour, while he remained in the cabinet and finished there the operations of his toilet, Lebel and the boy issued forth and went together to a room on the ground floor, where a single secretary was found busily writing by himself. The *valet de chambre* leaned down beside him, saying in a low, quiet tone, "Be pleased, Monsieur Hastelmont, to draw up an order for the liberation of Monsieur le Baron de Cajare, and carry it up for the king's signature; after which you will have the kindness to put this young gentleman upon the king's household book, one of the pages of the ante-chamber, with a pension of eight hundred livres."

The secretary looked round to the boy, and, perfectly ignorant of his previous condition, said in a quiet tone, "Will you have the goodness, sir, to tell me your Christian and surname?"

"My name is Julien Beaufils," replied the boy, and the secretary

made a note thereof, with the directions which Lebel had given him.

"Now, sir," said Lebel, speaking to the boy in the same tone as the secretary had assumed, "if you will go to my room I will join you in a minute or two, and we will have breakfast before you set out."

The boy went away without reply, and the moment his back was turned, the secretary inquired of Lebel, with somewhat of a grin, "Who have you got there, *mon cher*?"

"The devil himself for cunning," replied Lebel. "I believe he has done more for himself with the king in half an hour than many another man would do in a lifetime. I have never seen his equal in impudence, shrewdness, and hypocrisy."

"Not when you looked in the glass, Lebel?" replied the secretary, with a laugh. "You have done well for yourself, I fancy, too."

"Not I," answered Lebel: "but he is beyond any of us. Why, the day before yesterday, he was a *marmite* at Michy! However, Monsieur Hastelmont, be so kind as to make out those orders, and draw also an order for fifty crowns for me."

"Nonsense, Lebel," replied the secretary; "you know very well I cannot do that without the king's commands."

"The king intends it, indeed," replied Lebel: "you may ask him, if you doubt me;" and thus saying, he went away in another direction. In a moment or two after, he was speaking to the captain of the guard—one of the officers of the old regime, indeed, but one whose humble devotion towards his sovereign was elevated by none of those high and chivalrous feelings which were at one time characteristic of the French nobility. The officer in question laid his hand upon his heart, shrugged up his shoulders, declared himself ready to obey his monarch's orders to the death, and immediately gave some commands to one of his inferiors in grade.

After his brief conversation with the captain of the guard, Lebel returned somewhat slowly towards the royal cabinet, where he found Louis, freed from the importunate presence of his courtiers, and conversing with the secretary we have mentioned, alone.

"How is this, Lebel; how is this?" exclaimed the king: "how came you to tell Monsieur Hastelmont to give you fifty crowns?"

"I thought, sire," replied Lebel, with a low bow and a grave air, "that your majesty intended it."

"Why" exclaimed the king, "I never said any such thing!"

"No, sire," replied Lebel, with another low bow; "but I thought your majesty had forgot to say it. I was quite sure that the greatest and most generous monarch on earth would never give a boy a place and a pension because he had brought a piece of news which I would have discovered by other means in a few hours, and ~~never~~ give his poor servant Lebel a reward of fifty crowns for finding out the boy, and thus, in fact, gaining the information in the first place."

Louis had at first looked angry, but he laughed before the man concluded, saying, "Write the order, Hastelmont, write the order! Such a piece of impudence is worthy fifty crowns, for once in a way. Only take care that it be not repeated, Lebel, or you may chance to find yourself in the Châtelet some day."

"Any place to which your majesty might please to send me," replied Lebel, with a profound inclination of the head and turn up of the eyes, "would be cheered and brightened by the knowledge that I am obeying your will."

We need not pursue any further the conversation that took place between the king and his *valet de chambre*, which to speak the truth, speedily assumed a somewhat profane character. Ere it had gone far, however, one of the ministers was announced, and Lebel left his sovereign and went to breakfast with the page. The latter, however, was speedily summoned to lead the way at the head of a small party of cavalry, whose orders were to search for and bring into the presence of the king, Mademoiselle de St. Morin, upon the pretext of hearing her statement in regard to the illegal proceedings, as the order termed them, by which she had lately suffered. This excuse, which had been suggested by Lebel, was very specious, and one easily managed, for the king well knew that he could stop such inquiry at whatsoever moment he thought fit, and that his was one of those cases, where, to use the expression of the law, *he could take advantage of his own wrong*.

For a time, however, he was destined to be disappointed. The soldiery proceeded on their course, and the boy, who had taken care to mark every stick and stone between the chateau of Argencere and Paris, led them, without a fault, to the very gates of that mansion. All was quiet within, however, and the windows in the front of the house were closed. The court-yards were empty, and the officer, beginning to suspect that the boy had deceived them, threatened him highly with his own indignation and the king's, as a preparative to something worse. The court-yard and the stables were found quite empty; and again and again the officer rang alternately the great bell which hung at the front of the chateau, and the little bell which hung at the back.

At length, as he was dropping the latter instrument of noise from his hand, in despair of making anybody hear, he saw through one of the large grated windows which flanked each side of the back entrance, and had no shutters, something very like a human form crossing the hall within, and he accordingly addressed himself again to the bell with redoubled vehemence. The sound produced no effect, however, and he then seized upon the handle of the door, resolved to pull or knock it down, and to accomplish an entrance by some means. The door, however, yielded to his hand at once, and he now found that if he had applied for admittance in that manner at first, it would certainly not have been refused to him, the lock being merely upon the latch.

The moment he entered, he looked furiously round for the daring person who had neglected to attend to his repeated applications, and he beheld an old woman in a brown stuff gown, looked through her pocket-hole so as to show a green calimanco petticoat underneath. She was in the very act of looking into a closet in the wall, and throwing out upon the floor of the passage sundry little articles of household gear, such as brushes and dusters; and the coldness and deliberation with which she proceeded enraged the officer to such a degree that he felt a strong inclination to run

her through the body with his sword. He contented himself, however, with seizing her by the arm and shaking her violently, asking her how she dared to behave in such a manner to an officer of the royal guard.

"Yea, sir, yes," replied the old woman, looking calmly in his face. "Yes, sir, very! I am glad your honour thinks so. Everybody says the same."

"Says what? you old fool," exclaimed the officer; "says that you are mad or stupid?"

"Ay, terrible, indeed, sir," replied the ancient dame; "you are very good to say so. I have been so ever since I had the small-pox, in the year 1701. I was just eleven years old then, and I have not heard a word since, that is to say, distinctly. This is my best ear, and if you speak low, I can hear on that side sometimes; but this is one of my bad days, when I have such noises in my head as if all the bells in the village were ringing."

The officer thought that she might well have fancied all the bells in the village were ringing; but seeing that it was perfectly in vain to attempt to make the old woman hear, he proceeded without further question to search the house, much to the astonishment, it seemed, of the good dame, who remonstrated strenuously, but to no effect.

Not a room in the chateau was left unexamined; but, nevertheless, nothing was discovered which could lead any one to suppose, for a moment, that the place had been inhabited for many months, if not years. There was a look of dry and dusty solitude about it which was very convincing, and the officer suspected strongly that the boy had misled him, and deceived the king. In this opinion he was confirmed on going forth again from the house. He then encountered a little knot of villagers, who had been gathered together by curiosity, on the unusual appearance of soldiery, and asked them, where was the family belonging to the chateau?

"Why, bless you, monseigneur," replied one of the peasants, "the chateau has not been inhabited for these many years; not since my old lord died."

"Now, you young scoundrel," cried the officer, turning to the *marmiton*, "what do you say to this? Have you or have you not been deceiving us?"

"Deceiving you!" said the boy, with a laugh; "I should get very little by that! But I will show you something in a minute which will prove whether I have been deceiving you or not. Look at the marks of the wheels going into the gateway! Look where they have cut the grass in the court-yard. Now, ask Jean Bonhomme there, whether he has been cheating you or not; and whether there were not people in the chateau all yesterday?"

"No," answered the peasant who had spoken before, and who had heard what the boy said; "there was nobody in the chateau yesterday but old Jeannotte, for I took her up some bundles of sticks, myself, at twelve o'clock in the day. The boy's a liar!"

"So think I," replied the officer; and poor Julien Beaufile was very likely to go home with a bad reputation, and lose more by a mistake than he had gained by his wit, when one of the women interposed, saying—

"Ay, but you dwell a good way off, Paul; and I, who live by the road, heard a desperate galloping the night before last, and carriage wheels and all, as if the king were going by."

"And I," said a little boy, "saw the back court filled with men and horses!" Another of the party was soon found, who declared that she had seen a large train set out from the chateau about ten o'clock on the preceding day, when all the inhabitants of the hamlet were at a distance, in the fields, doing their autumnal work, she herself having come home to prepare her father's dinner.

Nothing more, however, could be learnt. No one could tell which direction the party, who had made this brief visit to the chateau, had taken on quitting it; and, after some further inquiries, the officer, beginning to find that the hour of dinner was passed, left one of his men to pursue the investigation, and turned his steps back towards Versailles. The march was considered too far to be accomplished that day, and it was, consequently, well nigh an o'clock on the following morning, before the marmion and his companions reached the royal presence.

The boy immediately found his way to the apartments of the king's valet, and entered the room without ceremony. He found Monsieur Lebel occupied, however, with two personages who were evidently worthy of some remark. The one was a gentleman of good mein, graceful exterior, handsome dress and person, but withal, possessing, in the highest degree, that indescribable air of supercilious licentiousness, which particularly characterized the courtiers of Louis XV. He looked, in short, as if he scorned everything, even to himself; and he certainly did scorn all things connected with honourable and virtuous feeling. He was sitting in a chair, tapping his shoe with his cane, and saying to Lebel, who stood beside him, "I really do not see, Lebel, what difference grades make in any act. There are only two entities in the world: pleasure and pain; and one thing that gives us pleasure is just as good as another; everything that gives us pain, bad alike."

So spoke the Count Jean du Barry, one of the least virtuous of the licentious court of Louis, where almost all were vicious. We shall not pause upon Lebel's reply to this exposition of the count's views, but turn rather to the other person that the room contained, whom we shall probably never have to mention again.

She was a young woman, dressed with great elegance and taste, though not with richness; but the extraordinary personal attractions, which she certainly did possess, were displayed in not a very decent manner. Hers was beauty, however, of a style which is the least of all others beautiful; for, although all the forms were fine and the colouring magnificent, though there was grace as well as symmetry, yet the expression, not only of the face, but of the whole figure, not of one individual feature or another, but of every feature and every limb—was of a painfully voluptuous kind. She might have afforded an excellent representative of the earthly Aphrodite, but never could have been mistaken for the heavenly one. Such was the person who, at that time, bore the name of Mademoiselle Lange, but who afterwards ruled France by her power over the weaknesses of a libertine king, under the name of Madame du Barry.

As soon as Lebel saw the boy, he exclaimed, aloud, "Have you found her?"

"No," answered the boy; "as I told you we should be, we were too late, and we have not found her."

"Never mind," replied Lebel, "I think we can do without her."

CHAPTER XXXII.

"ALTHOUGH they be a pack of rash and low-minded villains," said the king, speaking to Lebel, "we must not suffer them, on that account, to be punished for doing our will. You are sure that none of them compromised our name in the matter?"

"Quite sure," answered Lebel; "I have Monsieur Morin's word for it, sire; though he says, and so say the rest of the police, that there was not one of them who would have failed to plead your majesty's orders, if they had not been stopped, and that the Baron de Cajare actually did so."

So far, Lebel thought himself obliged to report Pierre Morin's speech truly; for he had a certain dread of the commissary of police, of his keenness and his power, which made him afraid of saying anything actually untrue of him, or of concealing anything from the king which Morin directed him to communicate. That dread, however, like every other kind of fear, was not a little mingled with dislike, and he lost no opportunity of saying every now and then, a word or two which he thought might injure the good officer in the opinion of the king. Louis, however, notwithstanding all his vices and his many weaknesses, had good sense enough to know those who served him well and zealously; nor would any slight cause induce him to withdraw his favour from persons who showed honesty and wisdom in his service. He was pleased with every appearance of devotion to himself, whether it took the form of depraved subserviency to his will, or any courtly shape of respect; but he would often bear opposition, and even rudeness, with the utmost patience, if it were proved to proceed from disinterested motives, and from a real zeal for his good, or that of the country.

This peculiarity of his character was strongly shown in the present instance; for as soon as the *valet de chambre* had done justice to the words of Pierre Morin, he went on in the true spirit of his class, to do the commissary as much disservice as it was possible.

"Indeed, sire," he continued, "I cannot help thinking that Monsieur Morin must have a great animosity towards Monsieur de Cajare, from the way he spoke of him."

"Indeed," said the king; "do you know any cause he has for thinking Monsieur de Cajare?"

"Not exactly," replied Lebel; "but, of course, it is very easy, your majesty, to see when a man hates another, by the way he speaks of him. He said that Monsieur de Cajare was a dangerous man to trust, for that, whatever he did, he always had his own interest in view; and, in short, he seemed to think very ill of him indeed, and not to conceal it."

"That may very well be, Lebel," replied the king, "without his

acting with any degree of malice or animosity. I may think you a vast scoundrel, Lebel, and not hate you either."

"Your majesty's too good," said Lebel, bowing down to the very ground, as if the king had paid him a high compliment; "but yet, sire, it was surely very saucy of this Monsieur Morin to go to Michy at all. What business had he there?"

"You do not understand what you are talking about, Lebel," replied the king: "these men chose to play the fool, and to pass themselves off for police when they had no occasion to do so, and which, moreover is quite against the law and my pleasure. Morin asked Monsieur de Choiseul if they had authority, and finding they had none, he of course proceeded to arrest them. He went a little beyond what was right, perhaps, in regard to Monsieur de Cajare, but still that person was very imprudent; and we have proof positive that he was inclined to betray the trust reposed in him."

"Well, your majesty," replied Lebel, "I have nothing to say against Monsieur Morin, of course; but I cannot help thinking that he did not act with due respect."

"Hush, hush!" replied the king, "say no more upon the subject: I have not a more faithful servant in this realm than that same Pierre Morin, and since he has been at the head of that office, an immense improvement has taken place in the police. Let the men be set free from the Chatelet, and see that the order I gave for Monsieur de Cajare not to present himself at Versailles, till further orders, be properly notified to him. I would have all who have been employed in this business be warned to be careful, if they would not find their way into prison again."

The orders of the king were duly obeyed. Notice was given to Pierre Morin to set free all the persons who had been taken at the chateau of Michy; and, summoning them one by one to his presence at his own bureau, he gave them a careful admonition as to a discreet use of any secrets that they possessed, and in regard to their future conduct in their various avocations. Pierre Jean was the last whom he thought fit to speak with, but not even the Chatelet had been able to diminish, by a shade, the brazen impudence of Pierre Jean.

"My dear friend and counsellor," he replied to the warnings of Pierre Morin, "it is all of no use; I could not be an honest man if I would: nature is against me; I was born to roguery as my inheritance; and I do declare that I have often tried very hard to behave like an honest man, without being able. Why, in this very business that I was put in here for, I vow, that twenty times, when I looked at the girl, and she said a kind word to me, I was tempted to give her a hint of the whole matter; but then Satan himself, or some of his imps, always whispered in my ears in the most insinuating tone possible, 'Two hundred louis, and all expenses paid.' It was ~~no~~ possible to resist that, you know."

"Hardly, indeed," replied Pierre Morin; "especially as, I suppose, my good friend, you expected protection even if you were caught."

"No, no, no!" replied Pierre Jean; "do not do justice to my prudence at the expense of my wit; I never expected protection at all. If it had been a shopkeeper or a poor man that had employed

me, I might have expected something of the kind; but the higher the person the less the security. No, no, no! Solomon, or some of those great people wrote, 'put not your faith in princes;' and he who said so knew more of his own race than most people do of their kindley."

"Well, Master Pierre Jean," replied Morin, "all I have to tell you is this, if I catch you at any such tricks again, especially with regard to this same lady, I shall deal with you in a different way from what I have done at present; for instead of arresting you for a minor offence, I shall have you apprehended for that business, on the other side of the maine, where robbery and an attempt to murder were in question; then we should see you swinging in the Greve to a certainty, you know."

"No, no, you would not do that," replied Pierre Jean; "I know you better, Monsieur Morin."

"And why not?" replied Pierre Morin. "You are deceiving yourself altogether. I will do it, as I live."

"No, no," answered the man; "but I will tell you why not. First, because you know that I never wanted to murder the man, or tried to murder him; and next, because you would never have a hand in hanging one of the oldest friends and acquaintances you have in the world."

"Friends and acquaintances!" said Pierre Morin, gazing at the man steadfastly; "what do you mean, sir?—take care what you say."

"Ay, ay," replied Pierre Jean; "twenty years does make a difference, and fortune changes favours; but I knew you well enough when I was shop-boy to old Fiteau the goldsmith. Ay, and I could tell you something more about that business if I liked—something that might astonish you to hear."

Whatever might be the feelings of Pierre Morin—whether he had or had not previously recognised Fiteau's *ci-devant* shop-boy—cannot be told, but he had by this time learnt to conceal all emotions, and not the slightest trace of any such thing as surprise could be detected on his countenance.

"I wonder, Master Pierre Jean," he said, "that you, who have been so long trading amongst the sharp people of Paris, do not know that there is nothing at all takes place which we are not aware of here. For yourself, I will give you your own history in two minutes, if you like to hear it. Here," he cried aloud to one of the clerks within, "give me folio five hundred, letter P. J."

As soon as the huge volume was brought to him, he turned to the words 'Pierre Jean, and that worthy beheld two or three long columns filled with his own good acts and deeds.

"Ay," continued Pierre Morin, as he read over the first part, "I see what you tell me is true, though I never looked to that part of your story before. You were shop-boy to Fiteau at the time he was murdered, and were strongly suspected, I find, of having purloined some of the articles you were sent out to deliver."

"Upon my honour," cried Pierre Jean, "I never stole a thing for three years after that."

"That is to your credit," replied Pierre Morin; "you caught the vice in the army, I suppose; for here I find you were drummed

out of the tenth regiment, and then again you were confined for three months for swindling, and then were charged with robbing the royal courier, for which Corvant was hanged, and then——"

"Ah, Monsieur Morin!" cried Pierre Jean, "stop, in pity's name! I see there is no biography like that of the police office."

Pierre Morin smiled, and, pointing to the end of the voluminous article headed "Pierre Jean," he showed him a long line of small crosses made in red ink, and asked—"Do you understand what that means, my good friend?"

"No, sir," replied Pierre Jean, who by this time was very much inclined to call him monseigneur; "pray what may be the interpretation thereof?"

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven," said Pierre Morin, counting the crosses, "that means hangable upon seven counts! But come, come, Master Pierre Jean, don't be down-hearted, there are one or two others that have got more crosses than you have. Why, the fellow I had executed on Wednesday week had ten, and you may escape yet, if you choose to make yourself serviceable, keep yourself quiet, and above all things hold your tongue when you are told not to speak."

"Oh!" cried Pierre Jean, "I will be as silent as the grave; my tongue shall never carry me to the gallows, if I can help it."

"No," replied Morin, "but you must always tell me what I want to know."

"Oh! I am ever at your honour's feet," replied Pierre Jean.

"Well, then," continued Monsieur Morin, "be so good as to tell me now what it was you said would surprise me."

"I don't think now," replied Pierre Jean, "that anything would surprise you; but what I meant was, that on that night when Fitau was murdered, I saw three men instead of two coming down the street. Two of them were those who were broke on the wheel; but there was a third, who is still living, for I saw him not many days ago."

Still Pierre Morin showed no sign of astonishment. "Did you speak to him?" he demanded.

"Oh! not I," answered Pierre Jean; "he is a great man now-a-days, and was going into the court when I saw him."

"You were wise," replied the commissary, "and will be still wiser, if you hold your tongue about the matter to every one."

"Oh! that I will," answered Pierre Jean. "I never thought of mentioning it: one hawk does not kill another, you know; but I did think that I might make use of the secret some time, for I was just then going down to Castelnau; and I fancied if I were caught, and they tried to punish me, I would stop them by threatening to tell what I knew."

"You would only have got yourself hanged," replied Pierre Morin, "and done him no harm."

"Ay, how so?" demanded Pierre Jean, with some surprise.

"Because," replied Pierre Morin, "when a scoundrel accuses a gentleman, he must either prove his accusation or prove his honesty; now I take it, Master Pierre Jean, that you could neither do the one nor the other. There was no word but your own for the matter, and you know well what your word is worth in any court."

throughout France. Be a wise man, Monsieur Pierre Jean, and do not meddle with hot pitch without a long spoon."

"I never thought of doing anything but frightening him," replied Pierre Jean; "and as to the long spoon, I do not know where that is to come from."

"Nor I either," replied Pierre Morin, "unless I give you one; but go along just now. You are free, you know, for the time being; you may be safe enough if you like; but if you interfere with things that don't concern you, you will have a hempen cravat before the week is out."

"I will take care, I will take care," replied Pierre Jean, who, to say the truth, had been a good deal more frightened by the conversation of the commissary than ever he had been in his life before, and with a very low reverence, he quitted the room, and was suffered to issue forth at liberty.

The next person who appeared before the commissary was introduced with some sort of secrecy, having been led from a back door which opened into a distant street, through various long and tortuous passages, to the office of Pierre Morin. He was a dark coffee-coloured man, with hair frizzed and powdered, sharp, keen, grey eyes, a skin somewhat marked with the small-pox; a waistcoat of very gay embroidery, and a snuff-coloured coat, with plain buttons. He bowed reverently before Pierre Morin, while the latter, as had become somewhat customary with him, looked at his visitor from head to foot for a moment or two, without uttering a syllable. At length the commissary opened his lips, saying, "You are the valet of Monsieur de Cajare."

The man laid his hand upon his heart and bowed to the ground, shrugging up his shoulders till they almost contrived to swallow up his head between them. "You have received the message I sent you," continued Pierre Morin; the man bowed again; "and are willing to agree to the terms," added the officer of police, liking him all the better for his taciturnity.

The man, in reply, gave the same kind of affirmation; and, looking upon that bow as a part of the sentence, he connected it with what was to follow by a conjunction, saying, "But I fear I cannot do so much as you expect."

"Why not?" rejoined Pierre Morin. "You would say that the baron is not communicative; that he does not talk to you as some gentlemen do to their valets; that he keeps his secrets to himself. I know all that already, my good friend. But what you have to do is this: to report regularly, twice or three times a-day, everything that you see yourself, everything that you hear from your fellow-servants, where the baron breakfasts, dines, and sleeps, who are his companions, what he loses or wins at play, and, in short, every particular that you have to tell, with all that you suspect; and leave us to do the rest. But you must never confound suspicions with facts."

"I will do all that you tell me, sir," replied the man; "and nothing you tell me not."

"Is the baron yet free?" demanded Pierre Morin.

"He is free, has dressed himself, and, when I came away, was talking with his sister," said the valet.

"Where does he go to-night?" demanded Pierre Morin.

"He goes to play at piquet," the servant answered, "with the Count de Royan and the Abbe de Verdun."

"He will lose money to them," rejoined Pierre Morin.

"I don't know, sir," replied the valet; "he is improved lately."

"But he is not equal to them," said Pierre Morin; "let me know what he loses, if you can find out."

The man promised to obey him; and all this matter being settled, the valet was suffered to depart, and Pierre Morin turned to other business.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

It is now high time to turn to Annette de St. Morin; but still we need not pause upon all that took place at the chateau to which she had been conveyed, before she again left it, from an apprehension which, as we have seen, was very just, that the course of her journey had been watched, and that means would be taken to pursue and bring her back to Michy.

It was, in a small plain *chaise de poste*, then, with none but one servant on the outside thereof, and containing within no one but Annette herself and the lady whom she only knew by the name of Louise, that Mademoiselle de St. Morin was pursuing her journey, through some woods which lie in the neighbourhood of Chartres. Donnine, Annette's maid, and another woman servant, with two of the men, had been sent upon another road nearly parallel, and were ordered to direct their course every day towards the same point as the *chaise de poste*. Two servants on horseback followed the carriage at the distance of about three miles, and another mounted attendant preceded it by nearly an hour's journey. Thus many precautions were taken; but these were not all; for the lady, in speaking with Annette during their first day's expedition, endeavoured to remove all anxiety from her mind by saying, "Fear not, my sweet child, fear not; we have a good friend actively employed in our service, who has greater means than any other man in France of baffling our pursuers, and misleading them as to our course."

The journey of the first and second day passed over quietly, and Annette's fears began to subside, and her heart to beat less timidly at every sound she heard, and every new face that she beheld upon the road. Her companion was all tenderness and kindness; but, even had she been less so, there was something in her very countenance, in the tone of her voice, in the expression of her eyes, which would have made Annette's bosom warm towards her, and taught her to trust and to confide. But in the long and thoughtful conversations which took place now as they sat side by side, in the occasional outbursts of feeling which poured forth from the lady's heart, in the deep and solemn comments which from time to time found their way to her lips upon the manifold subjects that they discussed—comments breathing of deep, long, earnest thought upon all the great and important points of human life, and man's strange destiny—in all these things Annette found fresh cause, every hour,

to admire and love the fair being with whom she was brought into such close communion. There was an interest, too, in the very mystery of their mutual connexion; a warm and thrilling interest, which made Annette feel differently towards her and any other human being. The very questions that she asked her own heart concerning that connexion, awoke all the tenderness and sweetest sympathies of our nature in favour of the stranger.

"What," Annette would ask herself, "what could be the meaning of that long, earnest, tender gaze with which the lady regarded her from time to time? What the secret emotions, which caused the tears suddenly to rise into her eyes? What the warm and overpowering feeling, which every now and then would make the lady cast her arm around her, and press a kiss upon her cheek and brow?"

Sometimes she would think that some of the nearest and dearest ties must exist between them; and her own heart beat at the idea with sensations nigh akin to ecstasy. But the sweetest of all the dreams—a dream which was nourished by the lady frequently calling her "my child"—was soon dispelled. Not only was there no ring upon the finger—for that in France and in those times might very well take place even in the case of a married woman—but the servants from time to time called her mademoiselle, a token which was not to be mistaken. What, then, could be the tie between them? for tie there evidently was. What could be the motive of all that lady's conduct? What the deep, heartfelt interest which was the secret of the whole?

Such inquiries set Annette's fancy roving through tracts which she had never ventured upon before. Up to that period she had asked herself but few, if any, questions concerning her previous history; she had rarely demanded, even of herself, who were her parents; she had never thought of why and how she had been left an orphan in the world, without any kindred tie that she perceived around her. This indifference, indeed, proceeded from no degree of apathy; but none of the circumstances in which she was placed had tended to awaken such thoughts. The love of the Abbe Count de Castelnau seemed fully to supply that of a parent; and in the secluded life which she had led, no events had hitherto occurred to conduct imagination on the path of inquiry. Had the child which the abbe had adopted been a boy, the case, of course, would have been very different. At each step, then, in life, some circumstance would have occurred to excite investigation. The prattle and inquiries of school-fellows, the companions of the camp or the field, the continual sight of all the ties of the world, the affection seen in other families, and kindnesses required and received by the individual, would all have made him ask long, long before, "Who, who, and what am I?—where are all the dear relationships, the sweet bonds which surround our childhood and our youth?—where are the kindred faces and the kindred names?—where the father's hand to guide and to protect?—where the mother's care to watch, to comfort, and to soothe?—where are the brothers, the sisters, the relations, the family friends, the sweet ancestral home, and all the bright associations of the past linked with the present? Such questions would have suggested themselves at every turn to the

mind of the boy or the man; but woman's nature is to concentrate her affections within a smaller circle; to pour them more intensely upon fewer objects; to give all lesser ties a lesser hold, and to be satisfied with limits that will not satisfy man.

Thus had Annette's life proceeded, contented with that which was, without looking into that which might be. A father's kindness could not exceed that of the Count de Castelnau, and she was satisfied with that love, without feeling a craving for more. She saw no happy homes around her, or but few, and those among the lower classes; and she was too little conversant with the joys of kindred to think thereof, except when her attention was forced towards them. Once awakened, however, the whole tender and deep emotions of her heart, a heart well calculated to entertain every affection in its most ardent and lasting form, prompted her to inquire, "Where was the family from which she had a right to expect such feelings as those which the lady evinced towards her?" and often as they went she would fall into deep reveries, from which she was only roused by some new caress, which seemed to speak that the subject of her thoughts was comprehended.

Still, however, the lady not only gave no explanation herself, but when Annette approached the topic of the kindness which she had shown her, and the interest she took in her, her reply was always turned in such a way as to intimate that all further inquiry at that time would be painful to her. On other points, however, she spoke much more frankly, telling her fair companion in what direction her apprehensions had pointed, and explaining to her, as far as such a thing could be explained to the ears of purity and innocence, the character of the king, and the infamous acts which were, from time to time, perpetrated in France, for the gratification of his licentiousness. The fears of Annette, indeed, had not before assumed any distinct and tangible form; and even now, though they took a definite direction, she shrunk from hearing more, and speedily, on her part, changed the conversation to subjects which certainly affected her actual situation less, but which were also less painful to her ear.

In this manner, as I have said, passed two days; and the evening of the second was coming rapidly on, when the carriage, making its way through the wood, not many leagues from Chartres, was suddenly stopped, and nearly overturned, by the fore axle breaking, and one of the wheels coming off. The country around, though beautiful, presented not the slightest appearance of a human habitation, and the embarrassment of the whole party was now extreme. No chance existed, the driver said, of finding any one capable of repairing the damage within the precincts of the forest, and it extended for at least two leagues farther.

After all the manifold consultations which generally follow such accidents, it was at length determined that the two ladies should set out with the coachman, as he knew the road better than the other servant, who was to remain in charge of the vehicle, and that they should proceed on the road to Chartres, until they met with some habitation, where they could either find shelter for an hour or two, till the carriage could be repaired, or lodging for the night.

The road was sandy and difficult; and although the soft, calm,

yellow light of the autumnal evening rested beautifully upon the mossy bunks and silvery roots of the old beech trees, though many a picturesque and enticing spot presented itself for repose, yet Annette and the lady hastened on, for both had by this time known enough of danger and sorrow to feel apprehension, even when no actual peril appeared. Not more than an hour of daylight could be reckoned upon; and Annette strove to make herself believe that, on a road so near a large city, and in a royal forest, one might wander safely long after the great luminary himself had sunk to repose; yet still she gazed eagerly forward at every turn of the road, in hopes of seeing some house or cottage, where shelter could be obtained before the last look of the sun was withdrawn from the earth.

Both the lady and Annette were somewhat fatigued from the wearying effect of agitation, and from several days of hurried travelling, which, at that time, was by no means so easy a process in France as at present, and the act of walking through the loose sand, or over the rough gravel of a forest road, soon tired them still more; so that it was with feelings of great delight, on every account, that at length the young lady exclaimed, "There is a house!"

As they approached nearer, they saw that it was not only a human habitation, but one of some size; and by the tall pole and garland before the door, it appeared to be a house of public entertainment. All was calm and silent, too, about the place, which pleased Annette the more, as it was not to be expected that the company, if there had been any, in a *cabaret* in the forest, would be very choice or agreeable; and the profound stillness of the whole scene, the sweet, low sunshine pouring over the open, sandy space before the house, and shining in at a door where sat a drowsy cat, enjoying the last rays, afforded a promise of tranquillity which was very soothing.

Advancing together, then, with their apprehensions of a long walk through the wood by night now dispelled, the two ladies entered the door of the little inn. They found the interior less inviting than the outside, indeed, for the first room that presented itself was the ancient well-smoked kitchen, at the further side of which, with her back towards them, was an old woman, busily engaged in cooking. She was not very cleanly in her apparel, and by her side was a girl of about ten years old, still less neat. The face of the latter was turned towards the visitors as they entered, and presented a sadly unwashed aspect, while a fearful squint in the left eye gave a disagreeable expression to features which might otherwise have been pretty.

"Oh, dame!" exclaimed the girl, as she saw the two strangers, "here are ladies, and one has got——"

But the old woman stopped the girl from announcing what part of the ladies' apparel excited her admiration, by turning round and giving her a push which drove her against the side of the chimney; and then, advancing towards Annette and her fair companion, she asked in a civil tone what she could do to serve them.

Their situation was speedily explained, and the good woman then informed them that about four miles farther on there was another house, where there was a blacksmith's shop. Somebody would be

found there, she said, who could immediately repair the carriage; but at the same time that she offered the assistance of her little girl to show the coachman the way to the next *carrefour*, from which place the road was direct, she expressed a hope that the ladies would stay at her poor house all night, as it would take a long time to mend a broken axle, and the distance to Chartres was nearly twelve miles. The countenance of the old woman was not very much more prepossessing than that of her daughter, or granddaughter, whichever she was, and Annette felt a strange reluctance to remain in the place of shelter which they had now found. She argued down her prejudices, however, and said nothing in opposition to the proposal, though her companion turned to her with an inquiring look.

"We have better and cleaner rooms up stairs, madam," said the woman, seeming to divine at once part of the objections which might suggest themselves to the minds of her guests against remaining, "and everything is quite clean and nice there. I will get you a good supper ready in a minute, too, and I'll warrant you will be very comfortable."

The ladies, without further question, agreed to stay, and the coachman was immediately sent off with the little girl. Before the latter took her departure, however, the old woman gave her various directions, some of which were in a low and indistinct tone, while others, Annette could not but think, were spoken with affected loudness. Notwithstanding all that she could do to combat apprehension, she did not feel at all easy on seeing the man depart.

She remained below thinking over her situation, and looking out upon the placid forest scene sleeping in the evening sunshine, while her fair companion, Louise, went up with the old woman to look at the rooms, the superior neatness of which she had boasted. As Annette paused and gazed forth, a tall deer bounded across, and took its way down the road which she and her companion had been themselves pursuing; and she was still watching his graceful form as he rushed onward, when suddenly, to her surprise, the noble animal fell forward and rolled upon his side, struggled up again as if with a last terrible effort, took a staggering step or two along the path, and then again came down, with his slender feet beating the ground in the agonies of death. No sound accompanied the fall of the deer; no report of fire-arms followed; but an instant after, three or four men rushed forth from the neighbouring thicket, and sprang upon the prostrate body of the animal, one holding him by the horns and another by the feet. Annette instantly drew back, and by the impulse of the moment, closed the door of the house.

She had reached the foot of the stairs which led directly out of the kitchen into the rooms above, when she heard the steps of her friend and the old woman beginning to descend. At that moment, however, the sound of voices and feet were heard without; and, nearly at the same instant, the other lady re-entered the room, and the men whom Annette had seen without, threw open the door, one of them exclaiming, before he discovered who it was that now tenanted the inn kitchen, "What the devil did you shut the door for, you old fool."

The man who spoke was in the act of dragging in the deer, aided by three others, and at the moment, as he was pulling the animal violently on by the horns, his back was turned towards the spot where Annette stood. The faces of those who followed, however, were in such a direction that they instantly saw the two strangers with the old woman, and the look of consternation which this produced instantly caught the attention of their companion, who seemed also to be their leader. Dropping the head of the beast which they had just slaughtered, upon the floor, he turned fiercely round, and gazed at Annette and the lady for a moment or two in silence, and then poured forth a torrent of invective against the old woman for admitting anybody to pry into what they were about.

"Lord bless you, my boy," cried the old woman, in a coaxing tone, "the ladies will never mind your taking a little bit of venison, nor tell about it either, I am sure."

But the man only seemed the more irritated in consequence of her endeavours to soothe him, and abused her with language such as had never before met Annette's ear.

"Oh! don't, don't," she cried, in horror at what she heard: "we will never say a word about it. We will pledge our word never to tell anything; but pray do not speak to her so."

The old woman's spirit, however, was by this time aroused—and a bad and a violent spirit it was—for she now returned the abuse of her son with far more acrimony and vehemence than he himself could command; and, as is very often the case in such encounters, overwhelmed and crushed, as it were, his rage, by the fierceness and volubility of her tongue. As soon, however, as this was accomplished, and she saw that the day was her own, she went close up to him, and taking him by the arm, spoke a word or two in a low tone, which instantly seemed to attract all his attention. He listened to her eagerly, gazing at Annette and the lady with a sharp and inquiring look, and a knitted heavy brow; and his eyes fixed particularly upon the large gold watches, with innumerable seals and pendants, and little jewels, which both the ladies wore, as was then customary with every person of rank and station in France.

"Ah! that is different, that is different," he said. "Come, let us pull the buck in;" and this was accordingly done, so that the door could be closed. As soon as it was shut, the man who had hitherto spoken exclaimed, addressing one of his comrades, "Lock it, lock it;" and the key was instantly turned.

Annette gazed with a look of consternation upon her companion; and the lady, at the same moment, asked, "Why do you lock the door?"

"To prevent any one coming in that we don't like," replied the old woman, somewhat sharply, while her son added, in a jeering tone, "And to prevent any one from going out who we would rather have stay here."

"Come, what are you going to be about?" said one of the other men, addressing the last speaker. "The lady does not seem inclined to do us any harm."

"No," said the other; "but those watches are mighty pretty things. I should think well worth fifty louis a piece; and it's more

than likely there may be purses worth three or four times that sum; so I don't see, as we must risk our necks for this venison business, why ——"

"But how will you keep them from telling, then?" said the other man.

"I don't know," answered the one who had spoken first. "We can think of that afterwards. They must stay here all night."

Annette's heart had sunk from the first words which had been spoken, and the lady who was with her shook very much, and was deadly pale. But Annette's courage rose with the danger, and she took a step forward towards the men, saying, "The watches are worth more than fifty louis each, I have at least as much in my purse, as you suppose; and we will give you the whole freely, and without your asking for it, if you will let us go on at once to Chartres, or rather as a reward for showing us our way thither. If we give you the money freely, there is no robbery in the matter, and therefore there will be nothing to tell; and besides we will promise—nay, we will swear—never to say one word of what has happened to any one."

"None!—nonsense," cried the old woman's son, "they would call it robbery all the same; and as for oaths, what are oaths good for! People swear to help them God! Who cares for God now-a-days? We have too much philosophy in France for that stuff now."

The sky had been getting darker for some time, and at that moment there was a long, low peal of thunder; but the ribald went on, with a scoff, exclaiming, "There: do you hear that? There was a time when the old fools would expect God to strike one dead; but I shall go on my own way, for all that grumbling."

"For Heaven's sake do not," said Annette. "We have never injured you in any way. We are willing to ——"

"Who is that at the door?" exclaimed the man. "Some one shook the door."

"Oh! it is only Tim and Henri, and the other fellow," said the old woman: "I told the girl to fetch them quick."

"Stop, stop: do not open the door!" exclaimed her son. "Let us be sure first."

But at that moment Annette turned her eyes to the window, and a loud cry of joy burst from her lips. The looks of all were turned in that direction also; but before any one could advance, the casement was violently dashed in, a man sprang into the room, and Ernest de Nogent stood by Annette's side. A servant followed with his drawn sword in his hand, and Ernest brought down the hilt of his own weapon, demanding, "Dear Annette, what is the meaning of all this? Who are these men? Why are you so pale?"

"Give me the cross-bow," said the old woman's son, stretching out his hand to one of the men behind him, but keeping his eyes still fixed upon Ernest de Nogent and the servant. "We must have no folly now, or we shall all swing. Give me the cross-bow, I say: what are you about?"

"I left it under the tree," replied one of the others. "I thought the beast would get away if I were not quick."

"You fool!" exclaimed his companion. "Fetch it, fetch it!—fetch it for your life!"

The man turned to the door, but Ernest de Nogent exclaimed, "Stop! stop! you will bring destruction upon yourselves: if you pause you are secure, but if you act violently you will bring certain death upon yourselves."

"Fetch me the cross-bow," replied the other man, furiously, "or I'll drive my knife into you. Will you stay and hear such trash as that?"

The other man still paused, but a third, who stood near the door, instantly turned the key, and threw it wide open.

"Hear me," cried Ernest de Nogent—"Hear me; for your own sakes, if not for mine, for nothing can save you but instant flight.—Quick, up those stairs, dear Annette," he added rapidly, and in a lower voice: "leave me to deal with them."

"No," she replied, in the same tone—"No: I cannot quit you now."

"Listen to me," continued Ernest, again addressing the men. "You suppose that you are all alone here—"

"No, we don't," cried the old woman's son with a grin, looking over his shoulder and seeing through the open door the heads of two men whom he knew. "Ha! Tim, my boy, is that you? and you've got a pistol too! Right, my boy, right! Give it to me quick! I will soon settle the account with this young man."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

As the man spoke whose words we have recorded in the last chapter, there was a loud blast of a horn in the open space before the little *cabaret*, and at the same moment the old woman's son perceived for the first time that the countenances of such of his companions as had just arrived were deadly pale and full of apprehension.

Instead of giving him the pistol, the man he had called Tim only exclaimed, "Quick, you fool, quick! Out of the back door into the wood, or we shall be taken, every one of us. There is the king and the whole hunt come up here after the buck you have been dolt enough to shoot."

Consternation instantly seemed to take possession of the whole party within; and the old woman's son, snatching the pistol violently from his comrade's hand, was the first to rush towards a door by the side of the stairs. Now, however, Ernest de Nogent cast himself in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand, exclaiming, "You are too late!"

The villain turned his eyes fiercely from him to Annette; and, as if he could read at once the feelings that were in the young officer's heart towards her, it was at her he instantly levelled the pistol, exclaiming, "Not too late for this!"

Ernest, with a single bound, sprang upon him, and caught him by the arm and the throat. A short and vehement struggle followed, in the very first efforts of which the pistol went off; but the next moment, after a reel hither and thither, the ruffian was thrown to the ground, and Ernest de Nogent put his foot upon his

chest and held him down. The villain received no aid from the companions of his wickedness; for nothing is so selfish as *vie*; and each, with the instinct of self-preservation strong upon him, made his way towards the door which led out the back way into the wood. All were not successful, however, in reaching it; for before the struggle between Ernest and his opponent had continued half a minute, a number of servants, and huntsmen, and guards, with several of the king's officers and gentlemen, poured into the house, and two of the men were caught and secured with very little resistance.

By the time that this was completed, Ernest had triumphed over his adversary, and those around were gazing on him as if for explanation: but the eyes alone of Annette perceived that the blood was flowing from his right side.

"Oh! you are hurt," she cried, springing forward, and laying both her hands upon his arm. "You are very much hurt, I am sure."

Ernest de Nogent made no reply, but pushed back the curls of hair from his face, and tried to answer with a smile. He felt, however, that he was wounded, and that if the struggle had continued a moment longer, he must have given way. The room swam giddily round with him, and all he could utter was, as he withdrew his foot from his prostrate adversary, "Seize the villain, seize him! Ah! dear Annette!"

Annette took his hand in hers, and supporting his arm, while one of the officers caught him as he was seen to stagger, guided him to the nearest chair. "The king's surgeon is in the carriage," said one of the officers, addressing Annette. "Call him, call him instantly," he continued, turning to some of the guards; "tell his majesty we have fallen upon a fine nest of villains here, but scarcely in time to prevent murder, I fear."

The other lady now advanced towards Ernest's side, and water was hastily sent for; but before it came, Ernest de Nogent had fainted, and the blood still continued pouring from his side. A moment after two gentlemen entered, the one clothed in black and the other in a rich hunting suit, and instantly the space around the wounded man was cleared.

"What is all this?" cried the latter. "Why this is Monsieur de Nogent: is he dead? How has this happened?"

"I scarcely know whether he be dead or not, sire," said one of the officers; "but it seems that in arresting one of these villains, whom he found slaughtering your majesty's deer, Monsieur de Nogent has been shot by that scoundrel you see there. The pistol was discharged after we entered the room. You see it is in his hand now."

The man, who seemed to be unconscious that he had hitherto retained the weapon in his grasp, instantly dropped it when he heard it named; but that only made the fact the more apparent, and the king motioned the persons who surrounded him to remove the person they had captured.

Annette's heart was aching as it had never ached before in life; but her eyes were tearless, and she only said in a low voice, addressing the person in black, who, she clearly saw, was the surgeon spoken of: "Oh! help him, sir, if it be not too late."

"No," said the surgeon in a mild tone. "No, he is not dead, mademoiselle, he has fainted; but that will do no harm: we shall the more easily stanch the blood and examine the wound. You two ladies had better retire; indeed, all had better do so, if such be his majesty's pleasure, except one or two of you gentlemen to give me a little assistance."

"Certainly, certainly," replied the king, and raming two or three gentlemen whom he ordered to remain with the surgeon, he continued, addressing the latter, "I shall leave you here, my good friend, with the wounded man; but one of the coaches shall stay for you, and if he comes to himself again, let him be taken whither-soever he wishes. In the meantime, we will go out, and hold the pleas of the gate before the door here, if this thunder has not brought rain with it. Allow me, mademoiselle, to conduct you from this place; there is a second carriage here at your disposal, for I suppose that you two ladies are those to whom we were told the *chaise de poste* belongs which we saw but now broken in the wood."

Annette merely bowed her head coldly, and the other lady replied, "The same, sire."

These words first called the attention of the king towards Annette's fair companion, and he seemed more struck with her appearance than with that of Annette herself.

"This is strange!" exclaimed the king. "Why, beautiful lady, am I right or wrong? Surely this is a face well known to me in other days, as that of the coldest and the cruellest of all the court of France; who, with all hearts breaking for her, has remained so many years in vestal seclusion?"

"So many years, sire," replied the lady, "so many years, that even the nine days' wonder has gone by with the little beauty that your majesty so flatteringly remembers. I can assure you, sire," she added, with a faint smile, "that the suitors whom your majesty alludes to are not very importunate now-a-days, and find it very easy to forget. But I will beseech your majesty to suffer one of the royal carriages to convey myself and this young lady on our road to Chartres, whither we were going when we were stopped by an accident to the carriage."

"May I ask the young lady's name?" said the king, leading Annette onward into the open air: "to judge from finding her here, in such close companionship with my young friend, Ernest de Nogent, I should suppose that this was that Mademoiselle de St. Morin of whom I have heard so much."

"Monsieur de Nogent," replied the lady, unwilling to come to the point, "has not been with us at all till within these five minutes, sire. Passing the inn, he found us attacked by these men, with the intention of robbery, and, I believe, murder, and he came to our assistance, like a gallant gentleman. His servant, there, can tell you more of the facts."

"But is this, or is this not Mademoiselle de St. Morin?" said the king who was not to be led away from his object.

"That is my name, sire," said Annette, coldly, but decidedly; and, thinking more at that moment of Ernest de Nogent than even of her own situation, she cast down her eyes upon the ground, and

remained silent, taking no further notice of the king, nor even displaying any of that sort of agitation from his presence which she might have experienced under other circumstances, and which, more than anything else, would have excited the interest and caught the attention of the monarch.

Louis was anything but pleased; but he determined, at all events, to bring her to Paris, whether she would or not; and he therefore replied to the other lady's request that he would send them to Chartres, by saying, "I fear, mademoiselle, that I must alter your destination. The trial of these men will immediately take place; your evidence must be given, and that of Mademoiselle de St. Morin; I must therefore beg you to return upon your steps with me. Mademoiselle de St. Morin I shall immediately place under the charge of Monsieur de Castelneau, who, I understand, is her guardian, and you shall yourself be conveyed to whatever place you think fit."

The lady replied at once, with an air of decision and dignity, which had its effect even upon Louis. "And it is absolutely necessary, sire," she said, "that Mademoiselle de St. Morin should not be left without a proper female companion, I shall accompany her till she is safe under the care of Monsieur de Castelneau, and then proceed to my own hotel in Paris."

The king bit his lip; but he knew that the lady spoke according to the rules of that court etiquette and propriety which he had strangely and inconsistently endeavoured to keep up, together with the utmost licentiousness of morals and horrible depravity in himself and in his courtiers. He therefore merely bowed his head, saying, "So be it, madam; you are quite right;" and a few drops beginning to fall from the clouds at that moment, he took advantage of the fact to break off any further conversation, by saying, "It rains; we had better betake ourselves to the carriages. See that those men be brought with all speed to Paris, and lodged in the Chatelet. Some of those gentlemen must ride who were promised places in the coaches. Monsieur Antoine, see these ladies to the second coach. The hunt has led us so far we must drive for an hour or two by night, though the storm seems coming on rapidly."

Thus saying, the king advanced with a slow step towards his own carriage, and took his seat therein, while Annette and her fair companion—led through the crowd of men, horses, and equipages which always followed Louis XV. on his hunting expeditions, and which now surrounded the house and filled the little space before it—approached the side of the vehicle that was destined to convey them on their way.

The king had by this time perfectly forgotten the wounded man, but so had not Annette de St. Morin, and her heart yearned at that moment to go back into the inn. To do so was indeed impossible; and there were feelings in her bosom which made her voice tremble and her cheek burn, while she said, in a low tone to the gentleman who accompanied them, "I would fain know before we depart what is the situation of Monsieur de Nogent."

It was an old man to whom she spoke, with all the habits and airs of a court about him, with the habitual courtesy of the ~~house~~

and the tongue, but without that real courtesy of the heart which gives life to the other. The moment he heard Annette's question, he put on a look of interest which he did not feel; and assured her, in a sweet tone, that the young gentleman was better, although he knew no more of the state of Ernest's wound than she did.

The other lady, however, with a woman's clear-sighted eye, saw more of the feelings which were passing in her young companion's bosom than Annette suspected; and she instantly said aloud, in as easy and courtly a tone as that of the courtier, "But we would fain have the last intelligence. This young gentleman has been wounded severely in our defence, and Monsieur Antoine is too gallant and polite a nobleman to refuse two ladies, who beseech him to go back into the inn, and bring them the surgeon's report."

Again Monsieur Antoine bowed low, and looked sweet, and shrugged up his shoulders, but at the same time he pointed to the royal carriage; and as he never did anything that was not agreeable to him, replied, "But the king, madame! the king! It is impossible to detain his majesty."

"I will go!" said a young gentleman who stood near, and in whose bosom—though, perhaps, it contained the seeds of many a vice—youth still kept alive some store of kindly and generous feelings; "I will go, madame; and will overtake you in a moment, if you will proceed."

There was no possibility of further delay, and Annette entered the carriage with a heavy heart. Her fair companion followed, and endeavoured to console her by a few whispered words. Monsieur Antoine and another old courtier filled up two places more, and the vehicle moved forward in the royal train. The moments seemed long to Annette; but it was, indeed, a marvellously short time that elapsed ere a horseman rode up to the side of the carriage, and putting down his head, the young officer who had undertaken the inquiry, said, in a tone of interest, "He is better! he is much better! They have extracted the ball, stopped the bleeding, and he is better."

"I told you so, mademoiselle," said Monsieur Antoine, as if Annette should have believed his empty reply at once: "I told you so; but you would not credit me."

Both the gentlemen had addressed Annette, and not her companion, for both felt instinctively that in her bosom there was a deeper interest towards Ernest de Nogent than that which had actuated her companion in urging the inquiry. But the tidings which were now given proved so great and happy a relief to the poor girl, that she heeded little the discovery of her feelings. She refrained, indeed, from shedding tears till the sun went completely down, which took place not long after; but to weep was the strongest inclination that she felt at the moment when hope was re-awakened in her bosom by the young officer's report. When darkness did cover the earth, she gave free course to the silent drops of many mingled emotions, and felt soothed and relieved by the indulgence. No one saw that she wept; but both the old courtiers who occupied the other side of the carriage perceived that she was grave and sad, as well as the lady who accompanied her, and they strove by idle chattering to amuse and interest her.

Both soon found that the attempt was vain; and Monsieur An-toisc. to whom his own ease was everything, gave himself up to a quiet sleep, while the other, whose tongue nothing could hold in bonds, went on to the end of the journey, talking with no one attending to him.

CHAPTER XXXV.

It was nigh ten o'clock when the royal carriages stopped at the king's private entrance to the chateau of Versailles; and after the monarch himself had entered, the door of the vehicle in which Annette had been placed was opened, and the two gentlemen descending, offered their hands to assist her and her companion.

Annette knew not where she was; but still an instinctive dread of the court of Louis XV. made her turn towards the lady who accompanied her, saying, in a low voice, "Pray, pray do not leave me!"

"I would sooner lose my life," replied the other, in the same tone. "I know not whether it will be necessary to alight at all. The king said that we were to be conveyed to the house of Monsieur de Castelneau," she continued aloud, "and perhaps we may be permitted to go there at once."

"The king waits you, madam, in the first saloon," said a gentleman advancing from the palace; and knowing well that there was no possibility of resistance, the lady led the way, followed by Annette. The two old courtiers conducted them forward with a grin: and, in the second of the long suite of rooms occupied by the monarch, they found Louis himself, surrounded by a large body of gentlemen and attendants, who, at a sign made by the king as he saw the two ladies approaching, fell back on either side, and left open for them the space before him. The room was full of lights, and, to the eyes of Annette, the worn and enfeebled expression of the monarch's countenance was ghastly and revolting; and certainly the fatigues of the chase, and the long and dusty ride which he had undergone before he betook himself to his carriage, had not served in any degree to diminish what was disagreeable in his appearance.

On the other hand, Annette was pale with agitation, fatigue, and fear. She was closely wrapped up in a travelling dress, which all that she had gone through after the accident to the *chaise de poste* had soiled and discomposed, and, moreover, the traces of recent tears were apparent on her cheeks, so that every circumstance combined to take as much away as possible from her natural beauty.

Louis gazed upon her as she approached, with no slight surprise; his lip turned down at the corner, and he gave a glance to one or two of those who stood around him; but still when not moved by passion, the king could display, at least, the manners of a gentleman, though there was always a cold and icy repulsiveness in his demeanour, which characterized the monarch who is said never to have entertained a sincere affection for any one.

"I have given you the trouble of alighting, ladies," he said, "to know if I can do anything to serve or assist you; or if you will take some refreshment before you proceed on your way."

Annette suffered her companion to speak for both, and remained gazing coldly and thoughtfully upon the ground. The other lady acknowledged the king's kindness, and replied, "I believe the only assistance your majesty can give us, is to suffer the royal carriage which brought us hither to convey us to our journey's end; and as repose is more necessary to us than refreshment, we will retire as soon as you will graciously permit us to do so."

"I have given orders that fresh horses should be provided to convey you to Paris, mademoiselle," replied the king; "the house of Monsieur de Châteaufort is quite at the other side of Versailles: such is his horror of the court; and as you pass you can deposit this fair lady there. I dare say the carriage is by this time ready."

The lady did not venture upon another word, but with a low reverence quitted the royal presence with Annette. They had scarcely left the ante-room, when the king turned to those around him, with a dull, sneering countenance, saying, "What think you, gentlemen, of this marvellous beauty, who has fired the hearts of so many people in Quercy? They must be very inflammable people there to be set so easily a-light!"

A loud laugh, of course, followed the king's remark; and as his opinion of Annette's beauty was very clear, every one hastened to cry it down. One declared that she was positively ugly; another remarked upon her being as white as a sheet; another said that her eyes were red; another, that she was awkward; another, that she had no form nor symmetry; another, that there was no life in her. There was many a dull jest spoken, and many a coarse or blasphemous expression used; and when the king, who stood coldly by and heard the whole, had sated his apathetic mind with ribaldry, he gave his courtiers an intimation that he wished to be alone, but beckoned his valet Lebel, who had been standing behind him, to follow him to his cabinet.

"Well, Lebel," said the monarch, as soon as the door was closed, "what think you of this wonderful piece of perfection that we have had so much trouble in bringing to Versailles?"

"That she certainly is not worth the trouble," replied Lebel.

"Why, she is positively ugly!" said the king.

Strange to say, however, this was one of the subjects on which Lebel made it a point of conscience to speak truth.

"No, sire," he said, "by your majesty's gracious leave, she is handsome; but she is as cold as a piece of adamant! She is a statue of ice."

"Then by my gracious leave," said the king, smiling, "she may be handsome for me, for I never wish to see her face again."

"Oh! her beauty is nothing very extraordinary," answered Lebel; "even if she were as warm as the first of August. She is in no respect worthy to tie the Lange's shoe."

"Ay! by the way," exclaimed the king, "I had forgotten what you said: remind me to-morrow."

"And in the meantime," said Lebel, "I suppose your majesty does not care how soon this lady goes from the court?"

"Not I!" replied the king; "but what is it to you, Lebel? What have you to do with it?"

"Why, sire," replied the valet, "I can see that Monsieur de Choiseul fancies that all the business at Michy was my doing, and is very angry with me on that account, because his nephew is in love with the lady; though I cannot but think that Monsieur de Choiseul might do better than meddle where your majesty is concerned."

"He might," answered the king, with a cold smile; "and where you are concerned, too, Lebel; but still Monsieur de Choiseul is too valuable a man to part with, even for a *valet de chambre*."

"Oh! far be it from me, sire," replied Lebel, "to dream of such a thing, or to wish any harm to Monsieur de Choiseul, who is certainly one of the greatest ministers that ever appeared; but I only thought, if your majesty permitted me to notify to Monsieur de Choiseul that the Count de Castelnau and family might depart, it would turn aside the duke's indignation from me, and make him look upon me more favourably."

"He shall do thee no harm, Lebel," replied the king; "and as to the rest, you may do as you will. I care not about the count's stay, now that the girl has been brought to Versailles in spite of his opposition."

"I thank your gracious majesty" replied the valet; "it may do me a great service with the duke."

"Why, you do not seek to be a financier, do you?" replied the king; "but come, I must to bed, for I am tired. Bring me a cup of coffee, and call one of the pages to read me to sleep."

"Will not coffee heat your majesty?" said Lebel; "chocolate is more nourishing."

"Well, then, let it be chocolate," replied Louis.

While such conversation was passing in the palace of Versailles, and while Lebel, who had, in fact, entered into a regular compact with the Count Jean du Barry and the infamous Mademoiselle Lange, to raise the latter to the station of a royal concubine, was adroitly removing from her path all chance of rivalry—for thus are kings managed and deceived—Annette and her fair companion were conveyed on their way towards the dwelling of the Count de Castelnau; and a brief but eager conversation took place between them.

"Dearest Annette," said the lady, "for reasons that you will one day know, I should wish you to say as little about me to your kind guardian as possible; and, indeed, unless it be absolutely necessary, not to give any account of the course we have pursued upon our various journeys."

Annette was startled and surprised. "Oh! dear lady," she exclaimed, "you surely would not have me conceal anything from one who has ever been more than a father to me?"

"It is because he has been a father to you, Annette," replied the lady, in a sad tone, "that I would have you be cautious in what you say. For his sake and for yours, too, it would be better that he should not drive inquiry too far; but still, Annette, I will not tell you to conceal anything; for God forbid that I should teach you to forget the noble frankness which he has inculcated. All I mean is this, that with regard to me and mine, and you also, if

many respects, dear Annette, the less Monsieur de Castelnéau knows, the better for us all, at least till some change has taken place in this court and country. Act, then, as you will."

"I have so little to tell," replied Annette, after a moment's thought, "that whatever I say I suppose can do but little harm. I know you, lady, by no other name than Mademoiselle Louise. With regard to our journey, I am only acquainted with the names of two places on the road, Meulon and Houdain; though I knew, indeed, that we were going to Chartres when we were stopped."

"That can do but little harm, dear child," replied the lady. "So now, my Annette, farewell. Remember me! love me! for I trust I am deserving of your love."

"Oh! that I will, ever," cried Annette, throwing her arms around her: "that I will, ever, most truly and most sincerely; for, though I cannot tell why, I felt from the first moment that I saw you I could love no one else so well."

The lady smiled, though Annette perceived it not; but she replied, "The time will come, my Annette, when you will find some one to love better. Here we are, however, and I must bid you adieu."

As she spoke, the carriage drove into the court of the hotel, and Annette asked eagerly, "Can I not hear from you?"

"Oh! yes," replied the lady, "Oh! yes; I could not live without that myself now."

"But how shall I find poor Donnine, and the other servants?" said Annette.

"I will take care of that," replied the lady; "and now, farewell, my sweet girl, farewell!"

By this time the bell had been rung, and servants with lights had come forth, gazing with no small surprise upon the apparition of a royal vehicle in that place. When, however, the door of the carriage was opened, and after one more embrace from her companion, Annette herself alighted, the surprise and the joy of the servants at the sight of that well-known and well-loved face exceeded all bounds. They pressed round her to kiss her hand and welcome her home; and then one of them darted away before her to the Count de Castelnéau, exclaiming, "Oh! she has come, my lord! she has come!"

The count asked not who, for his heart told him at once; and in another minute Annette was clasped in his arms.

"My dear, dear child," he cried; "my own sweet Annette!" and he kissed her with a tenderness and warmth which he had not ventured to indulge in for many a day before he quitted Castelnéau. But at that moment of joy and thankfulness for her safety, every better principle was awake in his heart, and he felt towards Annette more than ever as her father. No other image was present to his mind, no remembrance of aught else on earth, but that the dear child—the well-loved nursing whom he had fondled in her infancy—was there beside him, after many perils and a long separation; and in the presence of such feelings even the habitual aspect of cold stoicism which he had worn for many a long year, melted away like snow beneath the sun. His eyes actually filled with tears, and he gazed in her face as if he could never behold her home enough.

"You are pale, my Annette," he cried at length: "you are fatigued, and you have been weeping too. Oh! tell me, tell me, if you are safe, and well, and happy?"

"Oh, yes!" she cried, with one of her bright smiles; "I am well, only very weary; and both safe and happy, because I am with you; though I own I am very anxious for a gentleman who has risked his life to save mine, and has been terribly wounded in so doing."

"What is his name, what is his name?" demanded the count. "I shall be ever grateful to him."

"He is the son of the Baron de Nogent," replied Annette.

The count cast his eyes down upon the ground, and mused for a moment or two in silence. "Fate," he murmured to himself, at length; "there is certainly such a thing as fate! Well, my Annette," he continued, casting off the cloud again, "you shall not tell me your tale to-night; I see weariness in those dear eyes and that pale cheek; and some slight refreshment and some good repose must precede everything else. I will master my curiosity and impatience until then; but I shall be up early to-morrow to hear the whole; and as it may be necessary, perhaps, to take some sudden resolution of much importance, I will have everything prepared for whatever course it may be requisite to pursue."

Notwithstanding the count's determination to bridle his curiosity, as usually happens in such cases, much more was told ere he and Annette parted for the night. It was told, indeed, in a desultory manner, while she was taking some refreshment, of which she stood in great need; but, to say the truth, though her communication was out of all form and order, there was very little left to add on the following day. That Annette had seen the king, and had been brought by him to Versailles, grieved and perplexed the Count de Castelnau. The story of the lady who had rescued her from the chateau of Michy, afforded him another subject of deep and intense thought. The share which Ernest de Nogent had taken in the matter, also affected him, in a different manner, but not less profoundly; and for many hours after Annette had retired to rest, the count remained in the saloon, either leaning his head upon his hand and gazing at vacancy, or walking up and down the room, with slow and irregular steps, asking himself the ever-recurring question of "What next?"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

It was about six on the following morning when Annette awoke from a sweet and refreshing sleep, with sensations which such a sleep should entirely have cleared away. They were sensations of apprehension, of vague and indistinct alarm, in regard to some terrible occurrence. Starting up, she looked wildly around her, and it was some time before she could recollect where she was, or what had lately taken place. Though she still felt somewhat fatigued from her journey, the aspect of the strange room in which she was lying, and the memories that crowded fast upon her mind,

prevented her from falling asleep again, and she soon after rose, and began her toilet.

She had scarcely commenced, however, when the sound of feet hurrying hither and thither attracted her attention, and in a moment or two after, some one knocked at her chamber door. When she opened it, she found a servant, whose face expressed great consternation, and who informed her that the count had just been discovered still sitting in his chair in the saloon, in one of those terrible fainting fits which had first attacked him at Castelneau.

Annette instantly hastened down, and found him just recovering some degree of consciousness, under the care and skill of the faithful old servant who had accompanied him from Quercy. In a few minutes afterwards, the surgeon, who had remained also in attendance upon him ever since his first illness, joined the party likewise, and proceeded, with the greatest promptitude, to apply remedies which soon restored his speech.

An order was immediately given, by his medical attendant, to carry him to his bed-room; but the count raised his hand, saying, in a low voice, "That is needless, my good friend, for I must depart as speedily as possible for Castelneau."

The tone he spoke in was firm and determined; and the surgeon, who was not unaware of the many anxieties which had lately been pressing on his mind, gazed in his face with a look of apprehension and inquiry, but read there a resolute purpose that was not likely easily to be shaken.

"My dear sir," he said, speaking low, "I can comprehend your motives; but if you persist in going directly, your life will be the sacrifice. Give me five hours, and I think I can so prepare you, that you may set out at the end of that time in comparative safety. If you go now, you die; and then Mademoiselle de St. Morin is without any protection."

"But that of God!" said the count. "Five hours, however, my good friend, may render the whole too late. What o'clock is it now?"

"Not yet seven," replied the medical man, "the king rarely, if ever, comes forth till twelve, and while we are doing the best for you that we can, everything may be made ready. You must feel, sir, that it is impossible you should go at present."

"Perhaps it is," said the count, faintly; "perhaps it is"—for the very exertion he had made in speaking had well nigh exhausted the little strength which had been regained.

He was accordingly borne to his chamber, and placed upon his bed, although he would not suffer himself to be undressed; and there the surgeon, knowing how strong were his determinations when once taken, applied himself by every means to restore bodily powers, even of an artificial kind. In about four hours a great improvement was manifested, and the count sent Annette away from him to hasten the preparations for their journey. She had scarcely reached the saloon, however, and was speaking with a servant at the door, when another domestic came up in haste, announcing the Duke of Choiseul.

Annette turned very pale, for she knew nothing of that personage, and that he was the king's chief minister, and was considered

all-powerful in France. The carriages, she was well aware, were all ready in the court-yard, and the servants busy in packing them for departure; and, at the same time, she had gathered from various words which had lately passed, that the king had prohibited the Count of Castelnau from quitting the court, and had never recalled that prohibition. She was not a little alarmed, therefore, at the announcement of the duke's visit; but she had no time to think, for, with the usual rapidity of all his movements, Monsieur de Choiseul came close upon the servant's steps, and the moment after his name was pronounced, he was in her presence.

He addressed her, not only with courtly grace, but with a tender and kindly tone, which relieved her greatly, taking her hand as if she had been an old friend, and raising it with respectful gallantry to his lips.

"I see carriages preparing in the court," he said, after a few preliminary compliments had been spoken; "may I ask if they are for your departure, or for that of the count?"

Annette was silent for a moment; but it was not because she contemplated anything like equivocation, although the words of the duke might seem to throw an evasion in her way. It was, in fact, from a feeling of reluctance to speak at all that she paused; but when she did speak, she spoke the plain straightforward truth.

"They are for the departure of all," she replied; and when she had uttered the words, she gazed with a somewhat anxious and inquiring expression in the face of the Duke of Choiseul, expecting to see surprise and anger manifest themselves at once.

The duke, however, merely smiled, with a shake of the head, saying, "I have been forestalled! I suppose the count has had a message from the court this morning?"

"No, my lord," replied Annette, "there has been no message. Monsieur de Castelnau has been very ill this morning, so as to give me serious alarm, and he is even now lying down to gather strength for his journey; but I can convey to him any communication that you may think fit to make."

"This is strange," said the duke, in a musing tone; "but the truth is, Mademoiselle de St. Morin, in order to merit the reputation of a good politician, whenever there is unpleasant news to be communicated to a friend, I send a messenger for that purpose; but when the news is pleasant, I sometimes carry it myself. In the present instance, knowing very well that the count has a strong disinclination to remain at the court, and a still stronger disinclination that you should remain here, I thought it might be agreeable to him to receive the king's permission to return to Castelnau; and, consequently, as soon as the intimation reached me, I hastened to convey it to him in person."

Annette's whole countenance beamed with joy, and she exclaimed, "Oh! let me tell him immediately: it will make him so happy to hear it, for he was resolved to go at all events; and when you asked me about the carriages—I—I——"

"You were afraid of doing mischief," said the duke, at once, "and yet were too sincere to attempt to deceive me! Dear lady, you are both the worst and the best politician in the world."

Annette blushed deeply at his praise, which she felt to be praise

of no slight value; and the duke added, "Go to the count, Mademoiselle de St. Morin; present to him my best wishes, give him the king's permission, and say, that I will not intrude upon him just now, as he is both so ill and so eager to depart. I must write to him, I suppose, though I would have preferred a few moments' conversation. You must come back to me, however, fair lady, yourself; for I cannot forego the pleasure of your society for some little while longer, before I go to the dull business of the cabinet."

Annette made him a graceful reverence in return to the compliment; but she did not blush at it, as she had blushed at his former praise, for it seemed to her that his words were now merely those of courtesy; and she accordingly left him to convey the tidings she had received to her guardian.

When she was gone, the duke took two or three meditative turns up and down the room, with a long quick step, and murmured to himself, as if he had just come to an important conclusion, "Yes, she is very beautiful, and very charming, and very good, also: I do not wonder at the boy being in love with her. Well," he continued, "it is no bad thing either, if she be wealthy as they say, for Heaven knows I have no wealth to give them, and the house of Nogent sadly wants recruiting in its finances. It were no bad thing, indeed, if all the rest be right; but it is strange I cannot recall the name."

Again he mused, and again he traversed the room in the same direction as before; but whatever was the result of his reflections, he did not give voice to it in the present instance, but remained silent till Annette returned. When she did appear, he advanced kindly to meet her, saying, "Well, sweet lady! what says the count?"

"He thanks you most sincerely, my lord," replied Annette; "but farther, I must give his reply in his own words. He says, as the king has graciously permitted him to go, he will stay a little longer——"

"Although," added the duke, interrupting her, "he would doubtless have made the more haste to go if the king had not given him permission. It is seemingly a very treasonable paradox, my fair friend, which nevertheless I understand better than you do."

"But he added a condition," said Annette, "which was as follows: he would stay a little longer, he said, as the surgeon thought it absolutely necessary for his recovery, if you would kindly undertake that the permission to go should not be withdrawn."

"I think I can manage that for him," replied the duke; "but in order to do so, my dear young lady," he added, taking her hand, "I must exclude you altogether from our gay court."

"Indeed, my lord," replied Annette, "I have not the slightest wish to mingle with it, and shall esteem it a privilege to remain away. It cannot love me less than I love it."

"Nay," answered the duke, "it is for fear that it should love you too well, that I would keep you from it."

"Or for fear that I should like it too well?" asked Annette, with a gay smile.

"No!" answered the duke, gravely; "No, my dear young lady,

I fear not that at all; but you must recollect that I understand these things from long practice and somewhat sad experience; and I think that if you were to appear there often, ay, even once, you might be more appreciated than you were last night, and might be obliged to stay when you would willingly be away. I do not know whether I make myself fully understood."

Annette looked gravely down upon the ground, and remained for a moment or two in thought. She then answered, "Perhaps I do not fully comprehend, my lord; and it may be better for me not to do so. It is quite enough for me to rely implicitly on your good judgment, and to feel not the slightest inclination whatsoever to set my foot within a palace walls again."

"I really do believe, dear lady," replied the Duke of Choiseul, "that the two people who of all France can most sincerely make that declaration, are in this room together."

"You must add a third, my lord," replied Annette; for I am sure with my guardian it is the same."

"True," answered the duke, "true; he has proved it by nearly twenty years' absence, which has seemed strange to us all; for there was a time when no man loved better the court, the crowd, the city. He enjoyed them all, I have heard, much, though in a philosophical spirit; but then suddenly he abandoned them altogether, and plunged into the retirement of the country."

"He must ever have been fond of rural pursuits," said Annette; "and I, my lord, have been educated so much in the same taste, that being but little of a philosopher, I fear I could never find sufficient amusement in speculating upon the characters of my fellow-creatures, to compensate for the enjoyment of nature."

The duke laughed, and replied, "I am afraid that my taste differs somewhat from yours; I love the country, and can enjoy it much; but I love society also. I am fond of frequent and continual intercourse with the intellectual portions of nature. They, in fact, afford me a peculiar sort of the picturesque; I can see mountains and valleys in one man's mind; sweet meadows and calm places of repose in another; torrents and cataracts in the eloquence of a great preacher or statesman; soft-flowing rivers, and bright and sparkling rivulets in the conversation of a fair lady, or the table-talk of a man of wit. These are what I may call the landscapes of a great city, and in these I take much delight."

Annette paused and mused for a moment without reply; and the duke, who was in truth examining into her character while he was himself seeking a moment or two of relaxation in the society of a lovely girl, after waiting an instant or two, demanded, "You differ with me: is it not so?"

"No," replied Annette, "not exactly; but I was thinking that the enjoyments you speak of are better suited to a man than to a woman. To see these landscapes which you mention, my lord, you must examine closely, and probably may make many important discoveries. This is all very well for men; but for a woman's own happiness, and for the happiness of those around her, it is better to take a great deal upon trust."

"You said you were no philosopher," said the duke; "and yet, Mademoiselle de St. Morin, you show yourself a very profound one."

for depend upon it, that to comprehend what to know and what to leave unknown, is one of the strongest proofs of a philosophical mind. Every station and condition of life has a sort of knowledge peculiarly fitted to it, and a sort peculiarly unfitted. It is for God alone to know all things, and everything perfectly; and man can by knowledge undoubtedly render himself unhappy as well as happy."

"I believe it fully, my lord," replied Annette; "and I have often thought that I would not possess those mystic powers of discerning things that are usually concealed from us, even if the fairy tales were true, and some supernatural being were to offer me the privilege; although," she added with a deep sigh, "there are some things which I would give a great deal to know at this moment."

The tone in which she spoke, the sadness which suddenly came into it, and the anxious expression of her countenance, interested the duke.

"May I venture to inquire," he said, "what these things are? A prime minister of France is a great magician, young lady, who can conjure up more spirits than you imagine, to answer any questions he may put to them; and, let me add, that in your case he will do so with pleasure."

"Perhaps you may tell me one thing, my lord," replied Annette, with an eager look, but with a faltering voice and somewhat blushing cheek. "I am very anxious, indeed, to hear tidings of the health of the young gentleman who risked his life to save ours last night, and was wounded—so terribly wounded. They would not let me stay to give him that assistance which he so well deserved at the hands of one whose life he has twice saved."

The tears rose in her eyes as she spoke; and though she suffered them not to roll over upon her cheek, the duke marked the bright drops with some pain, not having heard the details of the preceding night's adventures, believing that Ernest de Nogent was by that time in Quercy, and doubting whether such emotion on the part of Annette might not prove unfavourable to his nephew's suit.

"You shall have an answer very soon, fair lady," he replied; "I have not been to the palace yet, and have heard but few particulars of last night's transactions; but if you will give me the gentleman's name who has thus suffered in your defence, I will send you a report in half an hour."

A servant had entered even while he was speaking, and before Annette could reply, he placed a note in the duke's hand, saying, that it had come by a messenger express from Chanteloup, on matters of life and death.

The duke instantly recognised his wife's hand, and tore the letter open eagerly. There was a very slight alteration took place in his complexion; and, as was customary with him when much moved, he shut his teeth firmly, as if to prevent any undignified expression, either of grief or anger, issuing forth through the prison-doors of his lips.

"This is, indeed, sad news," he said, "and concerns both you and myself, mademoiselle. It is my poor nephew, it seems, who has had the honour of being wounded in your defence."

"It is worse!" exclaimed Annette, clasping her hands together: "he is dying!—the servant said it was a matter of life and death."

"No, no," said the duke, taking her hand, and pressing it kindly in his own; "it is not so bad as that, my dear young lady, nor was it his life and death that was talked of. Ernest and Madame de Choiseul are both very anxious respecting you. We have all heard of your being subject to great grief and annoyance—nay, I must speak plainly—no danger, and to the risk of much and horrible discomfort, and Ernest feared that what had taken place last night might place you in a situation most terrible and trying to you. He knows that I am the only person who could deliver you from such a situation if you were in it; and he knows, too, that I would deliver you from it—If you wished deliverance—ay, though it cost me life as well as office. Ernest has been moved to Chanteloup, poor fellow, and makes Madame de Choiseul write by his bedside; but he is better, and the surgeon does not apprehend any danger."

Annette's lips moved for a moment or two with words of thanks towards him, who protects the good and the virtuous; and she then added aloud, in a calmer tone than before, "I did not know that Monsieur de Nogent was your nephew, sir; but I owe him such a deep debt of gratitude, that you will easily understand why I asked even a stranger to satisfy me with regard to his situation."

"I do understand it all, my dear young lady," replied the duke, with a look of kindly meaning, which brought the blood in a moment into Annette's cheek: "and I thank you most deeply for the kind interest you take in Ernest. He is not absolutely my nephew, though I feel as much affection for him as if he were, both on account of his own good qualities, and because he is the nephew of one I love better than myself—I mean Madame de Choiseul. However, I will write him a note from the palace, whenever I arrive there, to tranquillize his apprehensions regarding you; and let me beg you to set your mind at ease also regarding him. The surgeon positively says, that though badly wounded, there is no present danger—and you know he is well and kindly tended. I will now leave you, and will only add, that in case anything should happen to annoy or distress you, in spite of my best precautions, I not only authorize, but beg you to make use of my name at once, let the person who offends you be who he may. Say that I have positively promised to protect and defend you so long as you remain here, and that my honour is pledged to you as a French gentleman and a soldier, that you shall be neither subjected to restraint nor insult; require my presence and assistance loudly, and that demand must soon bring about an issue which I do not think, at this moment, there is any one in France would wish."

"How can I ever thank you, my lord," said Annette, with deep gratitude beaming in her eyes; "you are, indeed, all that I have heard. There is one thing more, however, which I could much wish—"

"I understand you," said the duke, with his quick perception; "I can easily conceive, that, as Ernest has been wounded in your behalf, you would wish to hear of his health from time to time. You shall have a daily report, dear lady, while you remain here; and now farewell, with thanks for a very pleasant hour."

Thus saying, he left her, and entered his carriage, remarking, as he did so, that there was an ill-looking, though well-dressed personage with one eye, examining the equipage with no slight attention. Common proverbs come into the mind of the great and small alike upon almost all sudden occasions of no great importance. They are, in fact, as it were, nearer at hand than any other reflection; and though the duke did think the unflinching stare of that one eye somewhat insolent, he muttered to himself something tantamount to "A cat may look at a king," while the carriage rolled away towards the palace.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

FOR several successive days a servant on horseback, bearing the livery of the Duke of Choiseul, was seen to stop at the gates of a house inhabited by the Count de Castelneau. In a court such as that of France, where everything was despotic, and all men were ruled, either by the absolute power of the monarch, or the tyranny of fashion, such a small thing as this could not pass without observation, and produce its effect upon many of those who bowed the knee to the one idol or the other. Previous to this time, the Count de Castelneau had been regarded merely as an original, not sufficiently extravagant to be worth cultivating for the sake of notoriety, but now he immediately rose into a person of some consequence. That the prime minister should visit him in person—that he should send a servant to him every day—argued no ordinary consideration. *Bizarre* had been the term they had hitherto applied to him; but now there seemed to be a prospect of the epithet being changed, and of the Count de Castelneau becoming *à la mode*. The courtiers called upon him, and were told that he was ill; but that was nothing to a people who, in those days, were always accustomed to die in company. So much so, that one might have fancied the Emperor Augustus was but a prototype of the whole French nation, though his last words were (according to report), "*Nunc plaudite*," and those of the dying French courtier, to the society assembled to witness his end, "*Pardonnez-moi si je fais des grimaces*."

To their surprise and consternation, however, the gentlemen who called, were refused admittance on account of the count's illness. This was received as a new proof of his absurd eccentricity, and they generally shrugged up their shoulders, as they quitted the court-yard, saying, "*Il a voyagé en Angleterre, pays d'originaux, où on meurt presque seul*," which, being interpreted, means, "He has travelled in England, that land of originals, where people die almost in solitude."

Frenchmen, however, soon get tired of anything that is unsuccessful, and the Count de Castelneau was not destined to be long troubled by the importunity of visitors at his gate. The tidings, however, of the frequent appearance of the Duke of Choiseul's servant in his court-yard, spread farther, and produced other results than those which we have already displayed. There was no exception, as we have seen, to the perquisitions of the police: every-

thing was reported there that was done, either by the king or the artisan, if it could be discovered at least, by the manifold eyes of that unsleeping Argus. The news, therefore, of these frequent couriers reached Pierre Morin, who, during the long protracted illness of the lieutenant-general, which took place about this time, carried on the whole important functions attributed to the superior office.

To him, it was not, in the least degree, difficult to combine such pieces of knowledge as explained to him the whole affair. He had been, of course, informed at once, with a view to the most legitimate exercise of his powers, of everything that had taken place in the forest near Chantres. He divined no small part of the feelings which existed between Ernest and Annette; and he concluded, from these frequent messages, that the Duke of Choiseul himself was anxious a union should take place between them. Of this position he was as well convinced as if he had seen the inside of the notes which were sent from time to time instead of messages.

It may be necessary, indeed, to say, that he did not see the inside of those notes, otherwise, we might naturally suppose that he did, it being well known, that every letter of any importance which passed through the French post-office, was opened and read, as well as many which were of no importance at all; for it is wonderful into what minute things that searching police condescended to pry; instances of which, equally absurd and disgraceful, might be given, were it requisite, or even decent to do so. The post-office, might, indeed, be considered as one great branch of the police; for there every letter, the contents of which were judged of sufficient consequence, was transcribed and sent to the lieutenant-general, or his deputy, to deal with the contents as might be judged expedient.

The couriers, however, of a cabinet minister could not be stopped and interrogated, though such of his letters as passed through the post might not be more respectfully treated than those of other persons. Thus the actual notes of the duke to Annette de St. Morin, for it was to her he addressed them, were only divined by Pierre Morin; but about the tenth day, a letter was sent to him from the bureau of the post, which bore immediately upon the subject, and interested him not a little. It was addressed to the Duke of Choiseul, and written in a hand carefully disguised, but which could not escape the keen eyes to which it was now subjected. A brief examination of the contents and the formation of the letters, convinced him whose was the pen from which it proceeded; and he smiled as he read the following words:—"The Duke of Choiseul is hurrying on to commit a folly. Before he compromises himself so far that he cannot retract, it would be well for him to inquire what is the birth and family of the person calling herself Mademoiselle de St. Morin?"

This was all that the epistle contained; and Pierre Morin's only comment upon it was, "Ha! ha! is it so, monsieur? We will frustrate you, as before;" and thereupon he sat down and wrote a brief note, which he kept carefully by him till one of his most prudent and trustworthy agents returned from some errand in the city.

It may be necessary, however, at this point of our tale, in order

to show the reader the whole secret machinery of what was taking place, to remove the scene, for a short time, from the police office, and lay open a suite of five very handsomely furnished rooms in the Hotel de Cajare. They were those appropriated to the only son of the marquis, who, as we have shown, had received distinct orders from the king, not to approach within ten leagues of the court; but who, nevertheless, thought fit to slight these commands, and to seek all the pleasures of Paris if he could not enjoy those of Versailles.

Objects, too, of very great and deep interest to himself kept him in the capital, although he knew that it was at some risk; for, as we have shown, under a calm, quiet, and polished exterior, the Baron de Cajare concealed passions, deep, strong, and terrible, which, when once roused into activity, overbore at once every habitual restraint and every consideration of his own security. Two of those passions were at that moment leagued together, and added additional virulence to each other. They were, love and revenge. Love the baron had never felt before, nor anything even approaching to it, and now that it had made its sway known, it was of course all the more strong and overpowering. Revenge was not an uncommon guest in his heart; and though of a craving and egregious appetite, had generally been hospitably entertained and fully satisfied.

The baron was, at the moment when we must bring him back to the reader's view, seated at a table, with an extremely white hand, and an extremely white ruffle, writing a note without any very great appearance of attention, or the slightest shade of trouble, sorrow, or anxiety on his countenance; and yet there was scarcely a man in Paris, from the garret to the cellar, whose situation was not in some respect preferable to him. He had just finished writing, when his father entered the suite of apartments which were especially appropriated to the baron. The marquis advanced, smiled, bowed low, and went through the whole manual of graces and courtesies, which he never failed to practise upon all persons, even members of his own family. The son rose, bowed with courtly dignity, and, pointing to a chair, begged his father to be seated.

The conversation then began by the marquis saying, "The servants told me, *monsieur mon fils*, just now, when I returned home, that you wished to speak with me, and I have come immediately to know what are your commands, trusting that you may, by your last night's party, have re-established your finances, and be desirous of repaying me the twenty thousand livres which I lent you last week."

"You are too good, a great deal, *monsieur le marquis*," said the son, "but you have made a slight mistake. Every card went against me yesterday; so that my object is the exact reverse of what you suppose. It is, in short, to request that you would lend me ten thousand livres more."

"Impossible! my son," cried the marquis; "I am now in the most desperate need of the twenty thousand I spoke of but now for I have a party, to play to-night with the Duke of —"

"But, my most respected father," interrupted the baron, "there is not the slightest use in telling me who you are going to play

with, when, or how, for I cannot contribute a livre to your game, even were it to save you from bankruptcy."

"The same, my dear son, is the case with me," replied the marquis; "I am very sorry, but it cannot be."

"Nonsense, nonsense," cried the Baron de Cajare; "let us reason over the matter quietly, and I will soon show such motives for lending the money that you shall not say a word against it." The marquis twisted his face into a peculiar expression, which might well be interpreted to mean that nothing could change his resolution upon the subject.

"Well, well, listen," said the baron; "you yourself told me the fortune of Annette de St. Morin; you yourself first urged me to seek her hand. Circumstances have, indeed, hitherto gone against me; but she is now almost within my grasp; and if I can proceed for one month longer, I shall obtain her to a certainty."

"Pho! my dear son," replied his father—"I tell you that's as low eard as any in your hand! The girl does not like you; will not have you; and her idiotic guardian will let her have her own way."

"I will have her, or die!" cried the Baron de Cajare, in a tone which somewhat startled his father, who was ignorant that his son had a single strong feeling left. He replied, however, as he had done before—

"Nonsense, my good son; she loves another; and as she is to marry whom she likes——"

"She shall never marry him," muttered the baron, in a low tone.

"Tush," exclaimed his father, impatiently; "you know nothing about it. In the first place, she loves him; and in the next place, the whole interest of the Duke of Choiseul is employed to obtain her for him. There are counters coming and going between the two houses every day."

"He shall not obtain her!" said the baron; "I have means that you do not know of. I have never yet failed in my determinations. Have you ever known me fail?"

"No, indeed," replied his father, "I never have, my good son, and perhaps you may not in the present instance, after all; but still I cannot help you. In one word," he added, speaking in a lower tone, "I wish you to be prepared for what may happen before long. Cajare is pledged for my last night's sitting: I am certain that there was unfair work on some part, and if I cannot make a good hit to-night, everything must go—do not look surprised—this house and everything in it."

"That is bad," said the son; "but you are foolish if you cannot stop that. Play at hazard—do not play at piquet; then the cards cannot go against you. It is what I intend to do to-night."

"But still the luck may run across with both you and me," answered his father: "we may throw threes or deuces when we would fain throw size."

The baron did not reply, but walked quietly to a little cabinet, unlocked it, and took forth some of those fatal pieces of ivory, which have produced the death and ruin of more men than pestilence or the sword. He carried some eight or ten of them in his hand, and laid them down before his father.

"Well," said the marquis, "what of them? I have seen dice before."

The baron smiled. "What shall I throw for you?" he asked.

"Size ace," replied his father; and immediately the son placed two of the dice in a box, shook them well, threw, and size ace appeared upon the table.

"They are loaded," cried the marquis.

"Not they," answered the baron. "I will stake my life that, let them be split to-morrow, neither lead nor quicksilver shall be found within them."

"But are they of one piece?" demanded the marquis, examining them closely.

"Entirely," replied his son. "Use them as you will, no flaw will be found in them."

"Do it again," said his father, and the trick was performed with the same success.

The Marquis de Cajare had looked on with eager eyes, as if anxious to detect the way in which his son performed this feat, but all seemed perfectly fair.

"Come, come, my dear boy," he said, at length, "explain it to me, explain it to me. Why, we may both make our fortune if we manage rightly."

"Yes," answered the baron; "but I must have something to begin upon. In short, you must give me one-half of what you have in the house; you shall then know the history of these dice, and have as many as you want for present use."

"On my life and honour," said the marquis, "I have not two thousand livres in the world."

"Then give me them for my secret," replied the baron; and the marquis having left him for a moment to fetch the money, he remained with his brow leaning on his hand, and an expression of dark and moody discontent upon his countenance.

The business of the money being soon settled, the baron pushed over some of the dice to his father, saying, "There, with those you can throw any numbers you like; the only thing is to put strength enough in throwing. With a good firm jerk, so as to give them their natural roll, they will each come up one certain number. When you want to vary the matter, and lose a little, throw them more gently, and you will find the result uncertain."

The marquis took the box, and tried several times with such perfect success, that he again felt sure the dice were loaded, and he boldly expressed that opinion to his son.

"No," answered the baron, "I give you my honour they are not loaded. The facts are these: When I was with the army in Piedmont last year, I was quartered in the house of an ingenious turner in ivory, who showed me some of these dice of his own making. Now in every tooth from which they cut these little cubes, there is one part harder and heavier than the rest; I believe it is the outer part; but that matters not. By soaking the other side in some particular acid, which he would not divulge, the ivory is rendered pulpy and light. I have seen it almost as soft as a piece of leather. It hardens again when dried, but never recovers its heaviness; and thus one side of each of these is not heavier

than a piece of porous bone, while the other is three times the weight. I bought these things from him in case of need. I have never had occasion to use them until now; but I intend to win back to-night, from Melan and the rest, the money they won from me last night—by some trick of the same kind, I dare say."

"Oh! dear, yes," replied his moral and honourable father, "with such fellows as those I should stand upon no ceremony. You may be quite sure they do the same sort of thing; so it is only diamond cut diamond, if we get a better way than theirs. But as to Annette de St. Morin, my good son, you had better give that up. You will only get yourself into trouble there, depend upon it!"

"It is to win Annette de St. Morin," replied the baron sharply, "that I use these dice. I want nothing but money; give me money, and I will find such means to use it that she shall be mine, even if she stood at the altar with another man. Do you think, sir, that I will suffer an inexperienced girl like that to foil me? or a romance-reading, sentimental fool like Ernest de Nogent to stand between me and my object? No, no: I will have her, or die, if it were only to triumph over the coldness she has shown. These dice shall be employed to some purpose, depend upon it, and she shall be mine before a month is over."

"Well, my worthy son," replied his father, "I wish you all success; but neither you nor I must have recourse to these little gentlemen too often or incautiously. Pray recollect that it is necessary to lose a little sometimes."

"Oh, yes!" answered the son; "and if you see that the roll of the dice is becoming suspected, we must be amongst the first to cry out upon it, and have them split in our presence: I have plenty more in that cabinet."

The father and the son smiled at each other, and then parted; the marquis returning to receive some company below, the son remaining in his own apartments to wait for the arrival of one whom we have seen before in companionship with him. It wanted, however, about half an hour of the time appointed, and the space thus left was employed by the baron in practising a little piece of sleight of hand, very necessary to gentlemen following the pursuit in which he was now engaged. This was the rapid passing of the dice up and down his sleeve, and concealing them in the hollow of his hand, even when it appeared to be stretched fairly out. He had brought this manœuvre to a high state of perfection, when one of his own servants opened the door which led from the ante-room, and quietly introduced our old friend Pierre Jean, who came forward with his usual look of cool effrontery, treating the baron with scarcely more reverence than he would have shown towards a boon companion.

"My father has just been confirming your account, my good friend," said the baron, as soon as the door was closed: "there are couriers from the Duke of Choiseul there every day, and we must stop this matter before it goes too far."

"There is but one way of stopping it," replied Pierre Jean.

"I have written the note," said the baron; "but, by my life, if you are deceiving me in this matter, Master Pierre Jean, your ears will not be very safe."

"Come, come, now, baron," said Pierre Jean, in his usual tone of jocular familiarity, "did you ever know me deceive anybody in your life? Do they not call me simple Pierre Jean, because I am as innocent as a dove?" The baron bit his lip, and the man proceeded. "Come, as I see you are doubtful, however, I will tell you more about it. This girl is the daughter of nobody greater or less than that respectable officer, Pierre Morin, the chief deputy of the lieutenant-general. Now, there are few people in Paris who know who Pierre Morin originally was. I was an old acquaintance of his, however, many years ago, and can tell you that he was nothing but a poor, dirty, filigree-worker, very often pinched for his supper. In one of those fits of poverty, his wife came to the shop where I lived at that time, seeking money. My master, old Fiteau, was too wise to give her any; but this Count of Castelneau, who was then Abbe de Castelneau, and a great customer of my master's, was then in the shop, and hearing her say that neither her husband nor herself minded the hunger, but it was for their child that they cared, took compassion on her, and went to visit them in their garret. I saw him give her money myself in the shop, and heard him say to some of his companions that he would go. He was at that time one of those wild, half-crazed fellows who do foolish things with a grave face, and call themselves philosophers. It seems he wanted a child to try experiments on, in matters of education, as he called it, though nine times out of ten he was as poor as a rat in those days, and had seldom money to provide for himself. However, I heard him talk about all this one day, and I am sure that this is Morin's child that he took and brought up, because, on the very night old Fiteau was murdered, I was sent with some money—it was but a livre—to Pierre Morin's wife, and I sat there with her for some time. The child was gone; and when I asked her what had become of it, she said a gentleman had adopted it as his own. She did not tell me his name, indeed, but——"

"Oh! it is clear, it is clear," said the baron; "St. Morin is very soon manufactured out of Morin; there can be no doubt of the fact; how shall I send the letter?"

"Through the post," replied Pierre Jean—"through the post. They open all the letters, we know well; but they will not dare to stop that: If you have put the thing rightly, so as to make the duke inquire, and if he be such an ass as to value birth and rank, and all that flummery, her marriage with Master Ernest de Nogent is stopped, depend upon it."

"There is not a greater stickler for noble birth in France than the Duke of Choiseul," replied the baron. "He was so when he was Count de Stainville, and depend upon it, being prime minister has not lessened his pride. The marriage is stopped, that is clear; the next question is, how to lead or drive her to an union with myself."

"That I can do for you, too, monsieur le baron," replied Pierre Jean. "I can manage the Count de Castelneau, and through him, I can manage her."

"You, you?" exclaimed the baron: "what do you know of the Count de Castelneau?"

"More than he would like any one else to know," replied the man, drily.

"I think you are mad," said the baron; "you wish me to believe that you possess power which you certainly would have made use of long ago to enrich yourself if it were really yours."

"Why, monsieur le baron," replied Pierre Jean, "a man may have power, and yet be like a peasant that I once heard of, who found a diamond in the rough, but, not knowing what it was, kept it in a cupboard, and was a poor man all his life, though he had a treasure in the house! I never knew what I am now aware of till the other day, when I found it out accidentally. Since then, I have had some thoughts of marrying the young lady myself! I should make a capital son-in-law for the chief commissary of police; for, thank Heaven, I know every rogue in Paris, and could help him marvellously in his vocation!"

"You impudent scoundrel!" exclaimed the baron, unable to believe that the man was really capable of doing what he pretended: "if what you say be true, why do you not, as you say, marry her yourself, with the large fortune which she must possess, instead of offering to aid me?"

"I have, at least, three good reasons, monsieur le baron," replied Pierre Jean; "in the first place, I am a moderate and unambitious man, and I can content myself with having always a good suit of clothes to wear, a good horse to ride, two or three good meals and two or three good bottles in the day, and some half dozen crowns over and above, for my *menus plaisirs*; that is the first reason, and whoever marries Mademoiselle de St. Morin shall furnish me with means for this way of living. In the next place, when I look in the glass, I sometimes think that mademoiselle might not like me for a husband, and certainly I should not like her for a wife, so well as the little sempstress up four pair of stairs in the Rue St. Antoine. Moreover, I have another reason, which, to say truth, is stronger than all the rest: there is but one man in Europe for whom I feel anything like fear. That is good Master Pierre Morin; and it does not do, baron, you know, to be afraid of one's father-in-law. Indeed, I do not think it would ever come to that; for I believe, if he found me pretending to the hand of his daughter, he would take care that before the priest could tie the marriage knot, the hangman should tie one of a less pleasant kind about my neck. Oh! he is a desperate fellow, that Pierre Morin: a determined tiger as ever existed. He always was. I declare I would sooner fight five Hessians, sword in hand, than feel the tip of his fore-finger upon my shoulder. It gives me a strange feeling of strangulation about the throat."

There was so much truth in what the man said, that the baron's doubts gave way in a considerable degree; and he mused for a moment or two, till he was at length roused by an application which he certainly might very well expect, but which he was not thinking of at that moment.

"In the meantime, monsieur le baron," said Pierre Jean, "you will be pleased to recollect that you promised me a hundred crowns for this other business—I mean, for stopping the marriage with Monsieur de Nogent. Have the kindness to pay me that; and

whenever it comes to the time for arranging her wedding with you, we will make our bargain upon that in proper form."

"Why, my good friend," said the baron, "the marriage is not stopped yet!"

"Oh! yes, it is," replied Pierre Jean; "and, besides, I am in desperate want of the money."

"So am I," replied the baron; "and I do not choose to pay for things beforehand."

"Well, then, I will tell you what," replied Pierre Jean, "hang me if you shall have her. I can give her to whomsoever I like, and nobody shall have her without paying for her. I am not one of those to be used as a ladder, and then kicked down when you have done with me. Here have I told you the way how to stop this marriage, you make use of it, and then you will not pay me."

"Come, come," said the baron, who saw that the man was really angry as well as insolent; "we must not quarrel, my good friend; all I want is, to have some assurance of success. You may tell me this plan, or that plan, or the other plan, will succeed, and I may find, a day or two after I have paid you, that the whole thing is flummery. For the present business, I will give you fifty crowns at once, and fifty more when I find that the marriage is really broken off. As for all that is to come afterwards, we must devise some scheme by which we shall be both so bound that neither can take advantage of the other."

"Well, sir, well," replied Pierre Jean, in his usual easy tone, "we are two great scoundrels, that is certain, so it is necessary to have something of the kind between us."

The baron bit his lip, and looked at the hilt of his sword, as if he had a very strong inclination to pass it through his saucy companion; but Pierre Jean went on without noticing these signs of indignation. "The matter will be easily settled, Monsieur Cajare," he said; "you shall draw me up a little promise, some time or another, that if you marry Mademoiselle de St. Morin, in consequence of the information I give you, you shall bestow upon me, immediately after your marriage, the sum of five thousand louis—not a denier less, monsieur. If her fortune be as much as you say it is, you can easily do that. I know nothing about what she has got, for my part, though I suppose the count will give her a good deal, and our friend, Monsieur Morin himself has had the picking of too many bones not to be worth five Jews and a French peer."

"I know very little of what she has," said the baron, in a somewhat surly tone. "My father's notary told me the other day that she had herself bought the little estate of St. Aubin on the Lot. But that is not worth more than seven hundred louis a year."

"Well, be her fortune little or great, the sum I have named is what I must have," replied Pierre Jean; "but you have time to consider of it. Give me the fifty crowns, and let me go now; for I have some friends to dine with me at Renauld's the *tailleur's*."

"Where the fifty crowns will disappear in no time," replied the baron.

"Then I will come to you for the other fifty to-morrow," rejoined Pierre Jean, whose impudence, like the Greek fire, could not be put out, whatever was cast upon it.

"Well," said the baron, "I shall then be more ready to give them to you; to-day I am very poor. I will have the paper drawn out you talk about too," he added, with a sigh, at the idea of parting with so much as five thousand louis. "It is impossible to be too quick, in this matter, for fear anything should occur to derange our plans."

"I am at your service," replied Pierre Jean, "quite at your service, whenever you like. As soon as the paper is signed, I will let you know my plan, and you will not doubt that it will succeed entirely, as soon as you hear it. I would not say so unless I were quite sure. Why, I am the honestest man in the world."

While the last few sentences had been passing between the two, the baron had pushed over the sum of fifty crowns to Pierre Jean's side of the table. The other took them up, put them into his pocket, without counting them, and, with a hasty and unceremonious adieu, left his companion.

As soon as he was gone, the baron started up, walked hastily to and fro for a minute, and then swore, with a dreadful imprecation, that he would try all other means ere he put himself into the power of that scoundrel.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE attack of illness which seized the Count de Castelneau on the morning after Annette's arrival proved more tedious than he expected. He went on recovering, it is true; day by day gaining a little strength, and losing the sensation of faintness which in this, as in the former attack, came upon him for some days whenever he attempted to move. His mind was now easy regarding Annette, who never quitted his hotel, and never received any of the persons who called, with the exception of the Duke of Choiseul, who came once to visit her for a few minutes about six days after the count had been taken ill. The heart of Monsieur de Castelneau was still further tranquillized in regard to the base pursuit of the king, by tidings of his insane passion for the low and infamous woman lately brought to his court, which was by this time a matter of notoriety. It may be easily conceived that such a relief to his mind greatly tended to facilitate his recovery; and it is not at all impossible that the fact, which soon reached his ears, of Ernest de Nogent being unable to present himself at Versailles on account of his wound, might also contribute to his restoration to health.

On the seventh or eighth day he was able to come down, and walk about the room for a short time; and he soon after began to speak of preparations for immediate departure. Annette had quitted Castelneau with regret; she longed to return thither, to its calm and quiet shades, and the fresh aspect of nature; but yet when the count spoke of leaving Versailles, she fell into a deep reverie. Her mind turned towards Ernest de Nogent: she thought that she might not see him before she went; that she might have no opportunity of thanking him for all he had done for her, no means of satisfying herself regarding his health, of making with her own

eyes how he looked, of hearing how he spoke. She fancied that it might be long, very long—months—years, perhaps—ere they met again; and the thought was very heavy to her, though she would not ask herself why. The surgeon, however, in acting wisely towards the count, acted kindly towards Annette, for he strongly opposed too early a departure; and the tenth day arrived before he even suffered Monsieur de Castelnau to go for a few hours to Paris to settle some necessary business previous to his journey. On that day, however, the count departed for the capital, leaving Annette at Versailles.

He had been very thoughtful during the whole morning; for during the preceding day he had questioned his adopted child, and had heard, for the first time fully, all that had taken place from the day of her leaving Castelnau. He had made no comments, no observations whatever; and, to say the truth, had endeavoured not to meditate upon the subject at all, knowing and feeling that it was the struggle with his own heart which produced those deadly fainting fits which so shook a constitution, naturally strong. He could not help thinking, however; and though he bent his resolutions firmly to resist every inclination to wrong, to stop the first suggestions of the evil spirit, and to listen to nothing but what was right and just, so that the contest was less fierce than it had been, yet the idea of ever parting with Annette, of seeing her love another more than himself, of even sharing her affection with any other person, was in itself sufficiently terrible to make him sad, and grave, and meditative.

He had been gone about an hour and a half, and Annette, after having employed herself for some time in various little preparations for her journey, aided by Donnine and her maid, who had rejoined her some days before, had given way at length to the impurity of thought, and had seated herself at the window of the saloon which looked over the lower ground towards the Seine. There were various moving figures in the distance, but she saw them not: there was the sound of the carriages and horses rattling along the roads close by, but she heard it not; and shut up within the sanctuary of her own bosom, her heart was communing with itself, and trying to overcome the sort of longing and eager desire that she felt to see, if it were but for a few moments, the man who had twice so gallantly come to her deliverance, ere she placed many a wide league between herself and him.

As she thus thought, she suddenly heard a step nearer to her than any she had yet heard, though the servants were working in the adjoining room, and turning round quickly she beheld Ernest himself within two steps of her. He was much thinner, and very pale; his lips bloodless, and his step less firm than before; but his eye was bright and full of clear high feeling, and his whole countenance sparkled with joy, which in itself was beautiful.

There may be clumsy merriment, but joy is almost always graceful.

The gladness of his heart was certainly not at all diminished by the sight of her: a radiant smile which beamed over her whole face, as, giving way at once to the impulse of her feelings, she sprang forward to meet him.

"Oh! is it, is it you?" she cried. "How happy, how very happy it makes me to see you!" and then she blushed at the eagerness of her own words; but still she would not stop them in their course, adding warmly and gracefully, though with the blood still glowing in her cheek, "I was just thinking of you, and fearing that I might not see you before we went back to Castelnau."

Ernest had taken her hand in his, and having done so, he retained it, leading her back to her seat, and saying, "I, too, feared that it might be so; and the surgeons became convinced at length that to let me visit you would do me less harm than continued impatience and apprehension. Oh! Annette," he continued, "I could not let you go from me without—"

Annette's heart told her plainly the words he was about to speak; it told her, too, that these words would be words of joy for her to hear; but yet she shrunk from listening to them, and even tried to stay them, saying, with a trembling and agitated voice, "But you are pale—you have suffered very much, I am sure; you must not stand by me: here is a seat."

Ernest understood it all as if by instinct. "Nay, nay," he replied, "I must remain standing, if, indeed, you would not have me actually kneel before you. Listen to me but for one instant, dear Annette, and forgive my calling you by that name, for I used it towards you on a night, the remembrance of which is most dear to me, though it was a night of danger and pain to us all; and if ever you bid me call you by a colder name again, Ernest de Nogent will never dream bright hopes in life any more."

"Oh! call me so, call me so, if you like it," replied Annette, looking up in his face with the glittering drops in her eyes, but with none of the world's guile or reserve in her heart. "Why should you not call me what you please, when I twice owe you life, and when you have suffered so much for me?"

"If I may, indeed, give you what name I please," exclaimed Ernest, eagerly, and with his whole face glowing with joy and hope, "I will call you my own Annette—my dear, my beloved Annette, my promised bride; may it be so, dear one? Oh, speak! for I can bear no suspense."

Annette bent down her head till her fair clear forehead rested upon the hand that clasped hers. She felt that hand tremble, however; and, even in the confusion of her own feelings and the agitation of her whole frame, she thought of his sensations, of his emotion, and looking up the instant after, she said, "Yes, Ernest, yes, if you wish it."

"Wish it!" he exclaimed, clasping her to his heart. "Do I wish for heaven, dear Annette? For next to the hope of serving and pleasing God, is the hope of guarding, protecting, and dwelling ever with thee. Where is your guardian?" he continued, eagerly. "I must speak with him at once, lest I indulge a dream of happiness that may be blighted in a moment."

"He is absent," replied Annette, "he is gone to Paris. But you need not fear, Ernest. He has always told me, in fact, that he will leave me entirely to make my own choice, if there be not some strong and overpowering objection; and that cannot be the case with you, Ernest."

"I think not," he answered, "I think not; yet I would fain see him, but as that is not possible, let me enjoy the present."

They did enjoy the present to the very full; for the sensations which they experienced were new to both of them, and a fresh world of enjoyment and delight was open to the hearts of each. To Annette those feelings came in all their first freshness, with none of the bloom of youth and affection brushed away; and all the sensations which she had hidden from herself, all that tenderness, and regard, and admiration towards him who now stood by her side, which she had so long imprisoned in her own bosom, now that the gates were thrown open, rushed forth, and almost overpowered her.

With Ernest de Nogent the emotions were, indeed, different, but not less sweet. He had mingled in the world; he had acted a part in the great drama of life; he had seen love in many shapes, though he had never known it himself; and to say truth, what between the examples of the passions he had beheld, and the perversions of the name he had witnessed, he had long shrunk from the very idea of subjecting himself to feelings which he had never beheld in their purest and their highest form. But all that he now felt taught him for the first time, what love really is; and the difference between that which he had fancied it to be, and that which he now experienced, was so bright and beautiful as fully to equal in delight the novelty, the entire novelty, with which it came upon Annette.

To dwell upon all they said would occupy too much time, and, perhaps, be not very interesting to others. Suffice it, that the candour and truth in which Annette had been brought up did not fail at that moment; and that the freshness and high tone which were peculiar to Ernest's mind proved now a blessing to himself as well as to her. He remained there for more than an hour in such sweet discourse; and neither of them ever dreaming that there could exist any obstacle to their union, talked of the future, the bright, the happy future, with all the fond confidence of youth, and hope, and love. An accidental word or two, however, from Ernest de Nogent, discovered to Annette that he had promised to make his visit but a short one, in answer to the earnest remonstrances of the surgeon; and as soon as she heard that such was the case, she pressed him eagerly to go. It was long ere he would consent, however; and when he did bid her adieu, he smilingly gave her a note from the Duke of Choiseul to her guardian, saying, "I am not acquainted with the contents, my beloved, but I know that it refers to us; and from my uncle's generous kindness, I am sure it is calculated to make us happy."

When he was gone, Annette covered her eyes with her hands, and tried to still the tumult of her thoughts. It was scarcely possible to do so, however, for all was a wild and whirling dream of happiness, such as she had believed it scarcely possible to feel. The words, the looks, the tones, of Ernest came up before her eyes without order or arrangement, troubled all her ideas, and left her no power of calm reflection. When she did recover a little, however, her mind turned towards her guardian; and, for the first time in her life, her heart beat somewhat anxiously at the thought of seeing him again. It was not that she feared any opposition, that she apprehended blame, or dreaded even that playful jest which

sometimes startles, though it does not wound. She felt convinced, from long experience, that her guardian would be happy in her happiness; she repeated to herself again and again that she knew him too well to suppose that he would not rejoice in anything which gave her so much joy. She repeated this often, very often; so often, indeed, that there may be a doubt whether some circumstance which she could not clearly define—some of those slight traits which cannot be grasped, but which seem to convince the heart without passing through the brain—it may be doubted, I say, whether some of these had not created a suspicion that her marriage with any one would inflict some pain upon her guardian, and did not produce a feeling of timidity which she would not otherwise have known. Certain it is, that she did feel in a degree uneasy; certain it is, that for the first time in life, she calculated how she should behave towards him; certain it is, that she fancied beforehand all she would say to him, and all that he would reply.

As time passed on she became still more apprehensive; and when, at length, she heard the carriage roll into the court-yard, she called one of the servants, and in order to lessen the burden of all she had to tell, bade him give the Duke of Choiseul's note to the count, and inform him that Monsieur de Nogent had been there. She then ran lightly away to her own room, paused thoughtfully for a moment or two, summoning all her resolution to her aid; and then, conquering her reluctance, she went back to the saloon, with a downcast eye and a glowing cheek, to tell the tale at once.

She found the count leaning upon the table, with the surgeon who had accompanied him to Paris standing beside him. The note was open on the table; and when she entered, the pale countenance of the count, though with a shade less colour than ordinary, seemed full of high and calm determination. His eyes were raised towards the sky, and his lips close shut; but he heard Annette's step the moment that she entered, rose, advanced slowly towards her, and pressed a kiss upon her forehead.

"Be calm, my dear Annette," he said, feeling how she trembled—"do not agitate yourself. I can comprehend all, and understand all, without your speaking."

Annette burst into tears, and the count, turning to the surgeon, continued, "Leave us, my good friend. I am calm, I can assure you. It is a struggle that agitates as long as it lasts, and not when the victory is won—and it is won! You can remain in the next room, if you are apprehensive; my dear child will call you, should it be needful."

The surgeon withdrew, with an anxious look towards Annette; and the count then led her to a chair, and seated himself beside her. "You need tell me nothing, my Annette," he said, after a momentary pause, for I read it all in your countenance. You have heard the words of love, you have heard them for the first time, perhaps, and you have been much agitated. That agitation has left its traces behind, but they are the traces of happy emotions; for the tears of grief and of joy are as different, even to the sight, as the dew of the summer morning and the heavy drops of the thunder storm. You have been happy, my Annette, and so far I

am happy too; but I fear lest that happiness may have its alloy. I fear that it may be followed by pain and disappointment."

"Oh! why, why, why?" cried Annette. "You surely cannot doubt that Ernest is—"

"All that is good, and generous, and noble," replied the count. "I know he is so, my sweet child; but yet, dear Annette, this world in which we live is not the holyday place that young hearts think it. It is a sorrowful school, where sad lessons are taught every hour, and I fear you have yet much to learn. I have just studied perfectly a painful task, and I am going to tell you what it is, Annette; for it is a part of my duty both to punish myself for the past, and to guard myself against the future. With you, my dear child, I have striven to deal without selfishness, but, alas, that sin is as subtle and general as it is base; and even when we think that it is most surely conquered, it finds its way in through some unguarded portal and takes possession of the whole heart. I have brought you up from infancy, loving you for yourself. In your education, I can fairly say I dealt generously with you, for I denied you many indulgences which would have indulged myself to grant; and I studied my own faults, as well as those of others, in order to preserve your character free from errors; but while all this was going on, Annette, I learned to be selfish in another way—"

"Oh! do not say it, do not say it," cried Annette: "you have never been so with me."

"Yes I have," continued the count: "selfishness, I say, took another form. I learned to love you for myself as well as for yourself; you became indispensable to my happiness, to my peace, to my tranquillity. It became necessary to me that the love which you had learned to feel towards me should be undivided and entire. The very thought of your leaving me and uniting your fate with another was to me as death; and though I struggled much to overcome it, such was the rebellion in my heart, that the effort has twice nearly cost me my life."

Annette covered her eyes with her hand, and wept.

"Nay, dear child," continued the count, "weep not. Have you not heard me say that the struggle is over, and that I have triumphed? It is so, my Annette, and I am only telling you now what has been, not what is. That you should stay with me, my dear child, ever stay with me, that you should never quit me to become the light of another home, to bring sunshine to another roof, was not, indeed, an expectation, but it was a longing, ardent, eager, selfish wish; to repress which, to trample which down, and to supply its place with better things, has been now the effort of many months. I might never have conquered it, Annette, had I not lately felt and seen that, for your happiness, it must be overcome."

"But why need I leave you?" exclaimed Annette. "Why may I not be always with you? Why may not Ernest, by his presence, add to your happiness, rather than take from it? Why may he not love you as well as I do, and you love him, both for his own sake and because he loves me?"

The count shook his head. "I trust it may be so, dear Annette," he replied; "because I hope, nay—from the calm manner in which

I can contemplate all—because I am sure that I have conquered at last this selfishness of which I spoke. But if, a month ago, Annette, you had asked me that question, why I could not love him both for his own qualities and because he loves you, my answer must have been, *because you love him*. I have triumphed, however, Annette, and I have completed the conquest this very day. From the moment you told me that he had again had an opportunity of saving your life, I saw that it was destined you should love him, and then began the struggle: but I must not think of those hours. Each day since, when the Duke of Choiseul has sent to tell you of his health, it has been to me as a warning. This morning, when I set out for Paris, I felt an impression that all must be accomplished now and at once; and, as I went, I made the last effort, and cast the viper from my heart. Henceforth, dear child, I live no more for myself; I live for you; in your happiness shall be my joy, and that which blesses you shall bless me also.”

Annette cast her arms around him, and wept upon his bosom. The count suffered her to do so for a moment, but then gently removed her, saying, “Now nerve your heart, my dear Annette! I have spoken to you of myself, and my own feelings; I am going to speak to you of yourself and your situation. All seems happy, Annette, and fair in your eyes; but in some far western countries, which I once visited in the wild wanderings of my youth, I have seen the sky more bright and glorious than you ever beheld it in these climates; the sea calm and glassy as a mirror, and blue as the heavenly arch that hung above it; scarcely a breeze stirring the foliage of the trees, and everything tranquil as the thoughts of heaven. On the edge of that radiant sky, on the very far, far horizon, I have beheld a cloud, like that seen by the prophet, not bigger than a man’s hand, and in half an hour the sky has been covered with storms and tempests. The waves have risen in mountains, the trees have strewed the ground, and all has been devastation and destruction where everything had promised brightness and prosperity. Such, my Annette, such a cloud there is, I fear, in your own sky; and now let me tell you whence it comes.

We people in France are as gross idolaters as any of those which were smitten by the Hebrews: every one worships anything he can meet with, but the true God. Amongst the old nobility of France, my Annette, high birth and long descent are the parchment deity they adore: to it they would sacrifice every kindly and tender affection of the heart; to it they would offer up every virtue, talent, grace, or quality, that can adorn human nature. Ay! for it, when called upon, would they slay their sons and daughters, and, as in this court, make their children pass through the fire of hell. Now, dear child, although in every other respect a generous-hearted man, Monsieur de Choiseul is one of these. So is also the old Baron de Nogent; and with them, I fear, we have not the resource which we might have with some others: for manum is the only deity which can tame pride, and here manum would be of no avail. Having spoken thus, Annette, you will easily understand what are the fears I entertain, when I tell you, that over your own birth there is a cloud, and that this note from the Duke of Choiseul contains inquiries on that very point.”

Annette had turned deadly pale, and she remained so, sitting in perfect silence for several minutes, as if unable to speak. The count gazed on her anxiously, and at length he asked: "What shall I say to him, dear Annette? How shall I deal with him?"

"Oh! in truth and in sincerity," replied Annette, "if it cost me my life, if it cost me more than life. Deal with him in all sincerity my dear father; let me never think that by me or for me, one word was spoken which could deceive."

The count's eyes fixed upon her with a glittering moisture in it, but still firm and eager. "Annette," he said, "I ask you of my own account; and in making your reply, you must remember all that I have told you of my own heart. None can judge but yourself; for I, alas! may deceive myself as to my own motives. If there were a possibility of concealing anything—of leaving anything untold which it is not absolutely necessary to tell—ought I, can I, leave it unsaid?"

"Nothing, nothing," replied Annette, "say all, say everything; everything even that you think; let there not be one single point to be told or to be suspected hereafter. Oh! my dear father, it may be God's will to deprive me for a time of happiness, but it can never be God's will to deprive me of honesty and truth."

The count caught her in his arms, and pressed her to his heart, exclaiming, "Nor will God abandon thee, sweet child!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

It was late in the evening of that day when another note was put into the hands of the Count de Castelneau. He was alone, for Annette had gone early to her chamber. The impression on the wax made him start; but after pausing for a moment, he opened it with a firm hand and read. The words which it contained were these: "The Count de Castelneau is required, by one whose seal he will recognise, to answer, when he is questioned concerning the birth of Mademoiselle de St. Morin, that he has every reason to believe she is of a high and pure family."

The count held the paper in his hand, and gazed at it sternly for several minutes. He then tore it to atoms, and cast it into the fire, saying, "I am nobly taught by that dear girl, and I will follow her example, be the result what it may."

At an early hour on the following morning, a servant ran up to announce that the carriage of the Duke of Choiseul was entering the court. This was very customary in those days, when the visit might be considered in some degree a ceremonious one; a running footman preceding the carriage, and giving the name of the visitor a few moments before he actually arrived.

The count, willing to do all accustomed honour to the high rank of the minister, immediately rose, and descended to the foot of the stairs to receive him, while Annette hurried to her chamber to pass the time in tears. Scarcely had she raised the cup of joy to her lips, when it seemed dashed away by the hand of fate; and she felt at that moment as if she had tasted of joy but to know sorrow. In

the meanwhile, the count and his guest had entered the saloon; and after a few of those courtesies which may partake of ceremony, but which still have great influence in preserving the amenities of life, the Duke of Choiseul entered upon the subject of his visit.

"I find, Monsieur de Castelneau," he said, "that my nephew, Ernest, very wildly and rashly, for as yet he is by no means well, made himself yesterday, while I was absent, the bearer of a note to you, which I intended to have been sent by a servant. He had a long conversation, too, it seems, with your sweet ward, you being yourself from home at the time; and he has certainly returned more in love than ever, which may very well be, as I never yet beheld a person so completely formed to turn the heads, and win the hearts, of old and young alike."

The count bowed his head gravely, replying, "There is no one like her in France, my lord duke: she is, indeed, a treasure, which might well make the house of any man rich in the best sort of wealth. She has also fortune of another kind, however, having already a very noble dower, and, in certain prospect, everything that I can leave: the Countship of Castelneau dying, as you know, with myself."

"That will, indeed, give her the dower of a princess," replied the duke.

"It will," answered the count; "but I very much fear, my lord, from the tenour of your note to me, and from my knowledge of your views, that my fair ward, with all these high qualities, and all this great dowry, may not be the bride of your nephew, Monsieur de Nogent."

"I grieve to hear it," said the duke, in a tone of real concern; "I grieve most sincerely to hear it, for to him it would be a most dreadful disappointment: let me add, to me a great disappointment also; for I never in life beheld a woman so likely to make an honourable man happy."

"You do her mere justice, my lord," replied the count; "but I am afraid it cannot be."

"May I ask the particulars?" said the Duke of Choiseul.

"Most assuredly," replied the count. "I explained to Annette last night, circumstances with which she was not acquainted; I told her the contents of your note, and I asked her to decide how she thought I ought to deal with you. Her reply, my lord, was, 'Deal with him in all sincerity and truth; conceal from him not one point of all that you know, or that you suspect:' and now, my lord, I am ready and prepared to act according to her wishes, which are founded upon principles that I glory in having instilled into her mind."

"Sir, I am sure, most noble and most sincere," replied the duke: "I needed no proof of that, sir. The objection, then, refers to her birth; am I to understand so?"

"It does, my lord," replied the count; "but if you have time, permit me to explain the whole."

"I have time, my dear sir," answered the Duke of Choiseul. "I have come at an early and uncereemonious hour, because I do not feel at all certain, that, after I have this day presented myself at

the palace, I shall ever set my foot in Versailles again. That, however, sir, will not make my heart ache. I fear what you have to tell may do so severely. Let me beg you however, to proceed."

The Count de Castelneau took up the history of Annette from the time he had first beheld her: he told how he had found her, adopted her, and educated her; and he saw by the pained and sorrowful expression of the Duke of Choiseul's countenance the changes which that tale was producing in all his feelings and sensations. When he had concluded that part of what he had to say, he paused for a moment, and the duke played thoughtfully with the hilt of his sword.

At length the latter replied, "Though it was, undoubtedly, a generous and kindly act, Monsieur de Castelneau, I cannot help believing that it was a pity so to withdraw this young lady from her natural station. The situation in which we are all placed by this circumstance, will excuse my thus commenting upon what you have thought fit to do: I regret it deeply, most deeply, for my own sake and for that of poor Ernest. I will not add for that of Mademoiselle de St. Morin, because, I hope and trust that her happiness may be in no degree affected by this unfortunate circumstance."

"My lord, you have every right to comment," replied the count, "on anything that you or yours may suffer; and I so far agree with you in your views, that, perhaps, had I been situated as I am at present, I might not have acted as I did. I was then, however, merely the poor Abbe de Castelneau. I had been reckless and extravagant, and all I could ever hope to save for the child's dowry, might amount to some few thousand crowns. I explain this to you," he added, somewhat proudly, "because I feel that an act of mine has remotely and accidentally affected the peace of a very noble and highly respectable family. You must be very well aware however, from the life we have led in the country, that I have never tried to force Annette upon any house of high rank, although I believe her qualified to adorn the most elevated station. Still, I have something more to tell, my lord—my tale is not done; and you will receive what I now say, not as an effort to satisfy, delusively, your pride of birth, but as the truth, simply spoken, in accordance with the wish of Annette, that I should tell you all I suspect, as well as all I know. I do not believe her, my lord, to be the child of the persons in whose house I found her; and I do believe her to be the child of two persons both of high rank. I do not imagine, however, that her birth would be mended in your opinion, even if the fact could be proved."

"If I understand you rightly, sir," replied the duke, "it certainly would not; and I will confess, my dear count, that in all the many transactions which I have had to go through in life, I have seldom, if ever, spent a more painful hour than that which has just passed. I had hoped, rashly hoped, that it would have been very different. I fancied that the young lady might be the daughter of some of the many members of our nobility, who either in troublous times, or in the rash days of their own youth, have lost the fortune which ought to accompany high blood; and I do assure you, most sincerely, that had she been the child of the poorest gentleman in

all France, I would have courted her hand for Ernest as if she had been a princess. As it is, I am sorry to say, my opinion is fixed, and cannot be altered. I know that the judgment of the Baron de Noght will be the same. You must feel, sir, that this thing cannot be."

"I beg your pardon, my lord," replied the count, drawing himself up, with a slight degree of the sarcastic bitterness which formerly characterised his countenance appearing in the curl of his lip: "I beg your pardon, my lord; each man's feelings are his own property, and ours are as different as our estates. I know that in accordance with the prejudices of society it cannot be; but I feel, also, that there are men who could trample upon those prejudices. Excuse me, too, my lord, if I say, that I could look upon no man as worthy of the hand of such a being as Annette de St. Morin unless, for her sake, he could tread under foot a worse devil than family pride."

The duke's cheek grew a little warm, and one of his usual brilliant but biting repartees rose to his lips; but kindly feeling triumphed, and he merely replied, after a moment's pause, "Do not let us say angry things to each other, Monsieur de Castelneau. This interview has been more bitterly painful to me than you are now willing to believe; and I have another to go through this day, nay, this very hour, which must be very grievous to me also. I have, sir," he added, in a grave, stern tone, "I have, sir, to risk offending, past all forgiveness, a king whom I have loved and served through the greater part of my life, in order to save him from committing an act which will cover his name with disgrace for ever. I beseech you, then, Monsieur de Castelneau, to let us part in peace, and to believe, when the Duke of Choiseul is no longer prime minister of France, that he only acted as he judged sincerely to be due to his family, and to the respectability of a French gentleman. It is very likely I may be wrong; it is very likely that, as you say, I may be prejudiced; but those prejudices have been so early and firmly instilled into me, that I believe from my very heart I am doing nothing but what is right."

The duke held out his hand; and his tone was so earnest, so sincere, that the Count de Castelneau could not refrain from taking it and pressing it in his own, saying, "We have both cause for grief, my lord duke. You, more than you will ever know; for you lose that which France cannot parallel. But no more of this: fare you well, my lord; I am sure you will do your duty as a statesman well and firmly, and that in the cabinet no prejudices of any kind will affect the enlightened minister and the generous and noble-hearted man."

Thus parted the Duke of Choiseul and the Count de Castelneau. The duke betook him to the palace; and all France soon rang with the news that the famous minister, for opposing the introduction of a common prostitute to the court of France, under the name of the Countess du Barry, had been dismissed by the king he had served so long and well, an exile to his house at Chanteloup. On the following day, and for many a succeeding week, a spectacle was beheld which Europe had probably never witnessed before: it was that of a large body of courtiers, grateful and devoted to a

disgraced minister. Versailles was deserted, but the road from Paris to Chanteloup was covered with the carriages of the highest nobility of the land.

These tidings reached the ears of the sad inhabitants of the house which we have seen the Duke of Choiseul leave. They produced little, if any, effect upon the hearts of either Annette or the count; for both had many a painful thought to deal with which left them little room for the consideration of merely political things. It was a terrible task for the Count de Castelnau to communicate to Annette the result of his conference with the duke; but as he usually did in every difficulty, he proceeded to execute it at once, and sent a servant to tell her that he was alone.

She came immediately, with a pale cheek and an anxious eye. Her first glance at her guardian's countenance showed her, that there was deep grief in his bosom, and she instantly understood the cause. Her heart sunk, her steps wavered, and she had nearly fallen before she reached the spot where the count stood. He caught her in his arms, however, and pressed her to his heart, saying, "Oh! my Annette, often have you consoled me: be it now my task to console you, beloved one."

Annette understood what he meant at once, and for a moment or two she wept bitterly, but she soon recovered herself. She thought of her guardian, of his feelings, of his happiness; and wiping her tears from her eyes, she said, in a low tone, "I must feel it at first, but it will soon be over. Do not grieve, my dear father: this is one of the lessons, you know, that you told me I had to learn."

CHAPTER XL.

HOPE, never-tiring hope, still sung her song in Annette's ear. She asked herself, "Will the good Baron de Nogent, he who has treated me in every respect so like a father, will he take the same cold view of the case which has been taken by the Duke of Choiseul?" She demanded still farther: "Will Ernest, will he, who but one day ago stood by my side with looks and words of the deepest and tenderest affection, will he so easily resign one whom he vowed he would love for ever?"

She would not believe it; and though she did not go on to calculate either what line of conduct Ernest himself would pursue, if he retained his purposes and affection towards her in despite of his father's opposition as well as that of the Duke of Choiseul, or what her own course ought to be under such circumstances, yet she thought that certainly Ernest would write to her—certainly he would give her that consolation, at least, even if he could not find means to see her.

Four days elapsed, however, and yet no letter came: no message, no tidings. It was a terrible time for poor Annette—there was all the wearying pain of expectation, and suspense, and hourly disappointment. She strove to banish from her face the care that was preying upon her heart; she tried to smile, to look contented; for

she saw the eyes of the kind and affectionate friend who sat beside her gazing upon her from time to time with looks of sad and sorrowful inquiry. The count, however, was not to be deceived; and now, now in the moment of her affliction, he felt how truly he loved her more than himself, and would have given his right hand to wed her to the man of her choice. Still, however, the count made no proposal to hasten their journey back to Castelneau; he delayed it, on the contrary, for he was not without some hope of hearing more from Chanteloup. He fancied that Ernest might have written to Castel Nogent; that the Duke of Choiseul himself might be pausing to inquire the sentiments of his nephew's father; and in that hope he waited, resolving to let the necessary time expire for a messenger to go to Quercy and return.

At length, on the fifth day, while Annette was dressing, her maid, who had been absent for a moment, returned with a note in her hand, and a look of importance upon her countenance.

"A page, mademoiselle," she said, "gave me this for you, and told me to deliver it in private."

Annette took the note, opened it, and read. It was merely signed Ernest, but the words were these: "I am in despair: the opposition that I have met with nearly drives me wild. Can I hope that you feel the same? If so, there is but one course for us to pursue: to fly. They can prevent our union in France, but a few leagues will bring us to the frontier of Flanders. There we can be married, and may set at defiance anything that all the world can do to separate us. I beseech you, I entreat you, if you would not drive me to some unpardonable act, follow this course immediately. Say not one word to your guardian or any one else, for that would be destruction; but meet me to-night in the park, close by the gate of the Trianon. You can come out, as if for an evening walk, half an hour before nightfall, and can tell Monsieur de Castelneau you will be back speedily: I will find you there as soon as it grows dusk. A carriage and horses shall be at the gates in waiting, and ere to-morrow night Annette may be my bride."

She dropped the note upon the table, and covered her eyes with her hands. Was it possible? she asked herself; were such the first lines that Ernest de Nogent ever addressed to her? Was such the proposal that he ventured to make to one who had never given him reason to believe that concealment or artifice was in her nature? Oh! how had she been deceived! Oh! how bitterly, how terribly, had love, and confidence, and inexperience cheated her! What was the first thing that he asked her to do? to wrong the trust and affection of one who had been more than a father to her through life. Was this the man upon whom she had fixed her whole hopes, her whole tenderness? Bitter and terrible as had been her disappointment before, it was all as nothing to this! Dark, indeed, was now the void left in her heart; for confidence was gone as well as hope, and all seemed night around her.

- She wept not; but after gazing for some moments in silence at the note, she hastily concluded her toilet, and snatching up the paper, hurried, with a rapid, but agitated step, to the saloon, where she found the count seated reading. He raised his eyes the moment she entered; and seeing at once that something had greatly

moved her, he exclaimed, "What is it, my Annette? What is the matter, my dear child?"

Annette did not reply for the moment; but, still advancing towards the table where he sat, she sunk upon her knees at his side, and laid the note before him, saying, at length, in a low and trembling voice, "Read, read, my dear father! and, if it be possible, give me consolation for that!"

The count took up the note, and ran his eye hastily over it.

"Yes, my dear Annette," he said, when he had read it, "I can give you consolation. That is not the writing of Ernest de Nogent."

"Oh! are you sure, are you sure?" exclaimed Annette, starting up, with tears of joy. "I could bear anything, anything but that. I could bear to lose him, but not to love him less. Oh! are you sure?"

"Quite, my Annette," said the count, "quite sure. First, those are not the sentiments of Ernest de Nogent; he has never acted on such ideas through life; and a man's past deeds are the best witnesses in his favour. In the next place, that is not in his handwriting; for before you arrived, I saw much of him at various times, and have seen him write. It is not even a tolerable imitation of his hand."

Annette looked up with hope and joy once more; and the count proceeded to say, that so convinced was he the whole note was a forgery, he would send it instantly to the Duke of Choiseul, and Annette should see the reply.

"Who the villain is who has committed this act," he said, "and what is his purpose, I may suspect, but cannot be sure. I am even afraid that we must let him escape unpunished, though it would be easy to take him at the gate of the Trianon; but it is necessary, on every account, my dear child, not to call observation upon ourselves."

The note was accordingly enclosed to the Duke of Choiseul, and sent off by a servant on horseback. He returned in the afternoon, bearing a reply from the duke, which, after some few words of compliment, went on to say: "Madenmoiselle de St. Morin only proves herself to be all that those who know her, are well aware she is. She must not doubt that my nephew, however sad and grieved in heart, will behave otherwise than all his conduct through life has promised. It is, moreover, impossible that he could have written the note which has been sent, and given her so much pain, but which bears not the slightest resemblance to Ernest's hand. He is at the present moment more than a hundred leagues distant from Versailles, having quitted Chanteloup for Quercy, notwithstanding all remonstrance, on the day after I saw you. That he went there at once, without any alteration of his intention, is proved by Madame de Choiseul having received a letter from him by the ordinary courier from Limoges. Let me trust that Mademoiselle de St. Morin continues in good health, and that she will not withdraw her esteem from the Duke of Choiseul, ~~and~~ of his family: for the regard of one so generous, sincere, and high-minded, is too valuable a possession to be lost without deep regret."

Such was the reply of the Duke of Choiseul; and it was sweet and consoling to Annette to know that she was respected and appreciated even by those who would not take her to their hearts as they might.

The day passed over with her in greater tranquillity than it had begun: for the apprehension of a greater evil seemed, now that it was dispelled, to have lessened the load of that which went before. The count, however, remained in a meditative mood himself; and though he continued to read during the greater part of the day, yet he often laid down the book, and thought for many minutes. When he took it up again he would appear to pay but slight attention to its contents.

At length, as evening began to close, Monsieur de Castelneau called one of the servants who had been with him for many years, and gave him some directions which the man instantly hastened to obey. Annette was sitting in the room at the time, but at some distance, and did not hear what passed.

In about three quarters of an hour the man returned, and immediately addressed his master, saying, as if in answer to a question gone before, "Yes, sir, he came as soon as it was dark, and walked about, gazing round for a little while; but when I came up, and looking him full in the face, made him a low bow, he walked away as fast as he could, taking no notice of me at all."

The count mused for a moment or two, and the man seemed to wait for further orders. At length Monsieur de Castelneau inquired, "Now, tell me, Jocelyn, truly and candidly, as your duty to your master should be greater, in your eyes, than any other consideration, have you seen your fellow-servants, or any of them, holding much communication with strangers, lately? for it is clear to me, that information of what passes in this house must be given to persons without."

The man paused, and looked towards Annette; and the count added, somewhat sternly, "Speak, without hesitation!"

"No one, sir," replied the man; "except mademoiselle's maid, Toinette."

The count was more susceptible of anything affecting Annette than if it touched himself, and he immediately replied, "If you refer to her interview with the page this morning, I know that already. She told your mistress, who told me."

"No, sir," replied the man; "I have seen her twice before speaking to a man with one eye. Old Jerome was talking to me about it; for he saw her once, also, when she did not know it, and he said it was very wrong of her to do so, for the man was that scoundrel who cheated mademoiselle into coming away from Castelneau."

"It was very wrong, indeed," replied the count; "I had hoped that there was not one servant in my house who did not love their master."

"Sir," said the old servant, "if you say that to her you will break her heart. The girl is not a bad girl, but somewhat foolish."

"Well," answered the count, "I must trust to you and Jerome to send her back to-morrow morning, early, to Castelneau. She must not remain here any longer. Say nothing to her about it to-

night, lest more evil should occur; but let her removal be carried through, quietly and calmly, to-morrow. Annette, my love, you must do without assistance from any one but good Donnine, till our return home, which will now be soon."

"Oh! I want but very little," replied Annette, "and indeed none. This conduct, too, of Toinette's grieves me. I have something more to tell you, my dear father, but I will do so in a moment or two, when we are alone."

The count made a sign to the servant to retire, and Annette then told him that she feared her maid must have heard her whole conversation with Ernest de Nogent, and must have revealed it to some one else. "The girl was in the next room," Annette said, "when he came. The door I had left ajar when I sat down to read, in order that she might ask me any question that she wished to put, concerning those things she was packing up. Whoever wrote that note, must certainly have had full information of all that passed between us then;" and her cheek began to burn at the thought.

"Yes, but neither a knowledge of your character nor of his," replied the count; "however, dear Annette, it will be better for us to go to Castelnau at once, for this man will evidently not quit his pursuit easily; and here, I have not the same power of protecting you and punishing him, as I should have there."

"But, oh! my dear guardian, recollect that Ernest is there, and if we go immediately after we have heard that such is the case —"

"I understand you, dear Annette," replied the count: "we will wait a day or two, at all events. He cannot accomplish much mischief in that time. You know, of course, my dear child, who is the man that has done this thing?"

"I suspect the Baron de Cajare," replied Annette.

"The same," answered the count. "He has been seen waiting at the place that he appointed. What rash and daring act he would have committed, and how he might be protected in the commission of such treacherous baseness, I cannot tell; for I grieve to say that, since the fall of Monsieur de Choiseul, he has dared to present himself again at court, from which he had been banished. He has, too, I understand, been well received."

"Oh! let us go," said Annette, alarmed at the news she heard; for her dislike and fear of the Baron de Cajare, had grown every hour with her affection to Ernest de Nogent. "Oh! let us go as soon as possible. We can proceed slowly: we need not arrive at Castelnau soon; and anywhere we shall be more safe than here."

The count smiled at her fears. "Nay, nay, my Annette," he said, "he cannot do us much harm for a day or two; and in the meantime I will write to Monsieur de Choiseul, and tell him why we intend to return to Castelnau so speedily."

Annette's feelings of alarm still continued, and they were more just than the count's feelings of security. But to show how such was the case, we must once more, for a time, change the scene.

CHAPTER XL

"So, monsieur le baron! So!" cried the fat and saucy voice of Pierre Jean, "you have been trying to work with your own tools, and have not succeeded! You thought to get off without giving me my due, but you can't do it. She is too shrewd to be tricked by such as you; and you had better come to my plan soon, for if you don't, I will hand the secret over to some one else, who will pay me better, I'll warrant. It was but a shabby trick of you to try to walk in by another door, while I was holding one open for you."

"It was a very natural trick," replied the Baron de Cajarc, who had listened, while the other spoke, with an unmoved countenance. "You don't suppose that I will meddle more with filth than I can help, or that I will deal with such dirty tools as you, when I can find cleaner instruments to work with."

Pierre Jean, to do him justice, liked straightforward dealing, so that this reply of the Baron de Cajarc pleased him perhaps more than anything that could have been said.

"Upon my soul!" he cried, "you are nearly as impudent as I am myself. You are a hopeful disciple, truly, and if you go on at this rate, and keep company with me much longer, you will be fit to cheat a pickpocket out of the snuff-box that he has just filched from somebody else. What! you call it dealing with cleaner tools, do you? Forging another man's name! aye, and sending a little puny swindler of a boy, to take advantage of what I told you of the *soubrette*, and make my pretty Toinette believe that the urchin was sent by me. Come, come, baron, this will not do any more; you shall either sign the paper within these five minutes, and go upon my plan, or I will lay another dog upon the track, and you may whistle for the game."

This sort of language the Baron de Cajarc did not certainly like at all: and, indeed, during his latter conferences with Pierre Jean, his mind had been in a state of constant vacillation between a strong inclination to run his sweet companion through the body, and a politic disposition to be excessively civil to him. He was frequently even obliged to pause for a moment, in order to decide between these two very opposite alternatives. Such was the case in the present instance; but policy put off the satisfaction of anger till an after-period, and revenge took possession of the offence as a thing belonging to her, and handed it over to memory to be accounted for at some future time. The oscillations of the mind between two such temptations, generally make it overshoot the exact point; and, in the present instance, the baron carried his civility too far.

"Nonsense, Maitre Pierre Jean," he said, "let us be good friends, and work together wisely. You cannot deny that it was natural

enough for me to wish to do what I could for myself, without help; as I find I can't succeed, however, I will show you in a minute that it was not alone to save my money. I have been a lucky man since last I saw you, and have made my good friend Melun's purse somewhat lighter than, I believe, it ever was before; so here are a hundred crowns for you to begin with, and now we will sign the paper at once; I am quite willing to give you any security in my power."

"Why, the paper I talked about will do," replied Pierre Jean. "It is true, the secret itself is worth something; but still, as you cannot work it without my help, and it must succeed with my help—for no man will like to put his neck into a halter if he can avoid it—I have a good hold upon you in all ways. This is something like doing business, indeed," he continued, sweeping up the money; "and now let us set to work heartily. You draw up the paper, and then let me look at it."

The paper, being accordingly written by the baron, proved satisfactory to Pierre Jean in all respects; and, having safely deposited it in an inner pocket, he sat himself down, for hitherto he had been standing, and proceeded: "Now, let us arrange our plans. You see, you are to perform, of course, the part of the lover in the farce."

"I suppose so, of course," replied the baron; "as you modestly decline taking that part upon yourself."

"Why, I never like to stand in a friend's way," answered Pierre Jean, with his usual effrontery; "however, your plan, then, in pursuit of your purpose, is to call upon the old gentleman himself, and, making him a low bow, request the honour of his fair ward's hand."

"Upon which," replied the Baron de Cajarc, "he will make me a low bow, and request me to do him the honour of walking out of his house; adding, perhaps, that I am as impudent a scoundrel as a man called Pierre Jean."

"Which, of course, you will take as a compliment," rejoined Pierre Jean; "but you will then, in reply, say that you are extremely sorry, but if you are obliged to do so, your only refuge, after leaving his house, in the state of disconsolate attachment into which his refusal throws you, must be either the river Seine, or the central bureau of police."

"Come, come," exclaimed the baron, somewhat sternly, "no jesting upon this subject; I am, indeed, attached to this young lady, and——"

"To her fortune," added Pierre Jean: "but, nevertheless, you will do as I say, monsieur le baron; and, moreover, you will be ~~able~~ enough to inform him"—and the man spoke slowly, and with a marked emphasis, "that you feel yourself bound to give information at the police-office in reference to something about the murder of Gaultier Fiteau, the old goldsmith, for which Count H. and the Chevalier M. were executed many years ago. Tell him that there is one person concerned therein still living: that, having discovered the fact, you are under the necessity of naming him to the police, and of bringing forward your proofs, not being in any way connected with him by blood or marriage."

"Ah!" said the baron, thoughtfully; "ah! is it so, Monsieur Pierre Jean? But how can I be certain that this will produce any effect? I must not threaten anything which I am not sure of being able to perform. You must give me the proofs, my good friend, you must give me the proofs."

"That would not exactly suit me," replied the villain. "When I ride I still like to have the curb thrown over my little finger, even though I do not use it, and I will give you the proofs as soon as I find occasion for it. Till then, they must rest with me. I will be my own witness, my good baron: but, if you think this is not enough to satisfy the worthy gentleman, and he asks any saucy questions about the matter, inquire if he recollects his walk with the Count H. and the Chevalier M. on the night of the murder of Fiteau, and all that happened afterwards? Give him a day to think of the matter, if he likes it; I can trust to the effect of thought in his case. It never yet made a man who has something to be afraid of more bold to have time to think over it."

"Perhaps not," said the baron, in a thoughtful mood, "perhaps not. Conscience is the worst of bugbears, after all."

"Conscience or no conscience," replied Pierre Jean, "the expectation of being broken on the wheel does not tend to nerve a man's sinews. Tell the count what I say: the prospect will be unpleasant to him, you may be sure; and if he do not consent himself, and make the girl consent too, I am very much mistaken. If he do act foolishly, the first appearance of Pierre Jean on the stage, and a word or two whispered in his ear by me, will alter the whole complexion of the affair, depend upon it, and very soon bring him to his senses."

The baron paused for several minutes, thinking deeply over all the man had said, weighing every probability, and calculating every result.

"It is a hopeful scheme," he replied at length; "the most hopeful scheme I have yet heard of; and if I could be certain that you have sufficient evidence to convict him, or even to cast a grave suspicion upon him, I should not in the least doubt of success; but the story is improbable. Unless, in the very first instance, there were strong proof, the accusation would not be listened to. He himself may take a high tone, and laugh it all to scorn; or, with one of his cold and cutting sneers, tell me to make any use of my information that I can."

"Conscience, as you say, my dear sir, conscience!" exclaimed the rogue, for the greatest villains upon earth know better than any other people, because they know, by experience, that particular effect of conscience, at least, which more or less makes cowards of us all. "Conscience, my dear sir, conscience! that is the thing which will prevent him from either laughing you to scorn, or from knocking you down with a sarcasm; and as to my having proof, rest satisfied that I have evidence enough: for there is another man in Paris besides myself who seems to me as much afraid of my telling the story as if the case were his own; because he knows that he will be called upon to bear witness when he would rather not. He thought to bully me about it, but he is mistaken, and only showed his own game when he was tripping my

cast. I should have a pleasure in repaying him a part of all I owe him, some of these days; but no matter for that: go you to the count without fear. Why should you not go at once? It is a fine day, and no time like the present."

"I should not be back in time," replied the baron. "I am to be with Melun and Rosenval, and several others, by eight o'clock, to give them their revenge, they call it, but I say, to take mine. I have not forgotten how Melun laughed when he thought I had not a crown left in my purse; but I will see him in the livery of a valet, or the rags of a beggar, before I have done with him."

"Quite right, quite right!" answered Pierre Jean; "but, nevertheless, there is plenty of time between this hour and eight o'clock. Think what a glorious prize she would be! Why, I understand that estate of St. Aubin, which you call so pitiful, is worth two thousand louis of rent! Then, if she have all the count can give, what a mighty fortune that will be! Come, come, monsieur le baron, make quick work with it: put on a new suit, a bold face, a stout heart, and a cool head, and go down and win the lady without more ado."

The baron smiled. "What must be done some time," he said, "may as well be done at once; so I will e'en try my fortune without more delay; especially if I am to give them time to consider of it; but I cannot help thinking that part of the plan is bad, Master Pierre Jean. The rapid decision, in the urgency of the moment, would be more in our favour, I should think." She will only hate me for forcing her inclinations, and hatred is a thing that does not diminish by reflection."

"Pho, pho!" answered the other, "that may be with a bungler; but, my dear baron, with a sweet man like you, the good impression may be easily given instead of the bad. Why, you can teach her to believe anything you like. Tell her that you are urged on solely by the deepest and the most passionate love; that her coldness has driven you to despair; that you care not what rash act you commit so that you win her; that you would ruin and destroy yourself and the whole world sooner than not obtain her, and that she is answerable for all the sins that you commit, and the misery that is brought upon others, if she do not marry you, now that all chance of marrying the other is done away with. Woman! woman! you have but to do with a woman!"

The baron had smiled at the first part of his companion's speech, amused to find how the playing upon the weakness of human nature was brought to a complete science, which every low villain could practise; but his feelings towards Annette were, in reality, too vehement to bear calmly any allusion to Ernest de Nogent. He bit his lip, then, till he left the marks of his teeth in it; and merely muttering to himself, "She shall be mine!" he rose from the table at which he had been sitting, locked up the papers from which it was covered, and the drawer with money which he had opened, and then saying, "Well, my good friend, I must lose no time, if this is to be done; come to me to-morrow about this hour, and I will tell you more of my success,"—he prepared to set out upon his journey.

Pierre Jean lingered a little in the room; but the baron, knowing

that he cultivated the various talents which he possessed for small pilfering and other methods of appropriation in aid of his grander schemes, took care not to allow him any opportunity, and sent him out of the apartment before he quitted it himself.

Bidding him adieu, Monsieur de Cajare set out with all speed, for Versailles. It was not long ere he entered the court of the house inhabited by the Count de Castelneau, and boldly asked for that nobleman. The servant who appeared in answer to his summons knew him well by sight; and—as in all houses, however carefully the masters may conceal them, all the suspicions and animosities which the experience, very soon make their way to their domestics—the man now replied boldly and somewhat rudely, that his master had ordered no person should be admitted.

“Nevertheless,” replied the baron, calmly, “you will be obliged to admit me.”

“Indeed!” said the man, somewhat startled. “I certainly cannot admit you, sir, without further orders.”

“Then go and obtain those orders,” replied the baron; “and inform the count that I come upon business of importance, which will admit of no refusal nor delay.”

The servant obeyed, and left him at the door; but in a few minutes he returned with an order to usher him into the presence of the count.

It was seldom that the nerve of the Baron de Cajare failed him; for he was a man of determined courage, great self-confidence, strong resolution, and much impudence. But on the present occasion various things oppressed him; the business which he had in hand also was somewhat obscure even to his own mind. He had hurried on into it with an insufficient portion of information to satisfy himself fully, and he followed the servant slowly, laying out the line of conduct he was to pursue. As the best general rule he could adopt, in a case where his information was vague, he resolved to make his language vague also, and not to enter into any particulars till he had again seen Pierre Jean. Having formed this resolution, and seeing that the attendant waited at the door of the room, he hurried his step, and entered the saloon where the Count de Castelneau was seated.

CHAPTER XLII.

ALTHOUGH Annette had quitted the room on the announcement of Monsieur de Cajare's approach, yet the Count de Castelnau was not alone. The surgeon, at his request, remained with him, and this increased, in some degree, the embarrassment which the baron felt. No one could have perceived, however, the slightest trace of hesitation or emotion in his countenance, as he advanced with a cool air and a graceful bow, to salute the Count de Castelnau. That gentleman himself certainly did rise to receive him, but with so cold an air, and so stern a brow, that his feelings toward his visitor were not to be mistaken. Little cause as he had to expect courtesy or kindly greeting on the part of the count, the Baron de Cajare thought fit to look upon this reception as rude and insulting; and the pugnacity of his disposition rising with the occasion, soon overcame every sort of distaste to the business before him, and he commenced the conversation at once, without waiting for any farther welcome than the mere cold bow with which the count noticed his entrance.

"Good morning, Monsieur de Castelnau," he said: "I am happy to see you looking so well; rumour taught me to believe that you were ill."

"For once rumour was right, sir," replied the count. "May I ask to what I am indebted for the honour of this visit?"

"Certainly," answered the baron. "You shall be informed thereof in one moment. But what I have to say had probably better be said to yourself alone."

"I cannot conceive that such a thing is necessary, sir," rejoined the count; "one's surgeon and one's confessor may hear everything I believe."

"In this instance," said the baron, "you will find, in a few moments, my good sir, that your general rule is not applicable. I must request, distinctly, a few minutes' conversation with you alone, though I think they might have been conceded at once out of common courtesy."

"The courtesy, sir, that you have shown to me and mine," replied the count, "has been of so *uncommon* a kind, that I might consider myself very well justified in denying your request. It shall be granted, however; and my friend here will leave us for a moment or two."

The surgeon left the room, and the count paused, knowing that silence at such a time is the most embarrassing thing that can be inflicted on an impudent man who has to begin an awkward conference. The baron, however, commenced without the slightest hesitation.

"I have requested that our communication should be private, count," he said, "as many things may occur in the course of what we have to speak of which had better be heard by no other ears but our own."

"I cannot see why, sir," answered the count. "As you have yourself sought the interview, which, I confess, I grant very unwillingly, you must lead the conversation in what line you like, and can therefore avoid anything that is disagreeable to yourself."

"Oh! it is not that I fear at all," replied the baron: "it is not to spare my feelings, but your own, that I am solicitous."

"Indeed!" said the count, drily. "Pray go on."

"Well, then, sir," proceeded the Baron de Cajare, "let me inform you, that I come to demand the hand of Mademoiselle de St Morin, knowing the circumstances of her birth, and everything concerning her."

"You come to demand the hand of Mademoiselle de St. Morin!" said the count, repeating his words, with a sarcastic turn of the lip: "may I ask upon what grounds this great claim is founded?"

"I will tell you, in one moment, sir," replied the baron; "it is better founded than you are aware of. Every principle requires us to give up to judgment persons who have been guilty, at any period, of great and terrible crimes, or who have taken part therein; and there can be but one excuse for not doing so. That excuse can only exist when we are connected with the criminals by near and dear ties, and when the voice of nature and affection may be supposed to overpower a sense of justice. Now, sir, looking upon Mademoiselle de St. Morin as your adopted child, I think the person who marries her may consider himself exempt from the duty of doing anything that may injure you, although the strict law of the land may require him to pursue a contrary course: do you understand me?"

"Not in the least, sir," answered the count. "If you come here to play the part of the Sphinx, with a riddle on your lips, you must even enact the character of *Cedipus* also, and solve it yourself."

"I think, sir, it can be solved in one moment," said the baron, "and by one word. Turn your thoughts back into the past, count, and tell me if you recollect the name of *Gaultier Fiteau*?"

The count sat down, for he had hitherto been standing, and the deadly paleness which came over his countenance showed the baron at once that he had touched a tender spot. "I see, sir," he continued, "that you do recollect the name. I will beg you to make a still greater effort of memory, and tell me whether you remember where you were, and how employed, on the night and at the moment when *Gaultier Fiteau* was murdered?"

The count made no reply, but remained in death-like silence, with his eyes fixed firmly on the ground. The baron, too, added nothing more for several moments, leaving what he had said to work its effect. Judging from all that he saw, that the words already spoken were enough, he determined not to show the scantiness of his information by attempting to create any greater alarm; and a few minutes' reflection confirmed him, not only in acting thus prudently, but also in soothing and softening the way for acquiescence.

"Pray be calm, Monsieur de Castelnau," he said. "I seek not to gain or to injure you; very far from it, I assure you. I deeply and devotedly love Mademoiselle de St. Morin. I would do anything on earth to obtain her, and have, perhaps, been led by this passion into rash and unjustifiable acts; but still she must be mine; and all I now ask is, that you would behave in this business, not according to the wild and somewhat inappropriate notions which you have imbibed from that mad nation, the English, but as every other parent or guardian in all France would, and give her to the man whom, all circumstances considered, it is best that she should marry."

"I cannot, sir; I cannot force her inclination," burst forth the count. "I have promised her her free choice; and were I to die to-morrow, I would not retract from my word."

"But, doubtless," said the Baron de Cajare, "Mademoiselle de St. Morin herself will not drive the matter to such alternatives, if she be left to judge for herself. May I be permitted to plead my own cause with her for a few minutes alone?"

"Ay, and tell her this whole tale," exclaimed the count, "false as it is, and baseless altogether, to make her abhor the man whom she has loved from infancy, and—"

"Your pardon, your pardon!" said the baron. "I have told no tale at all; and if anything said be false or baseless, you cannot have the slightest occasion to fear it."

"Nay, nay," replied the count, "that follows not at all. There may be circumstances—nay, I deny not that there are circumstances, which give to the most innocent the appearance of guilt. Do we not all know how often, upon full and legal proof, the innocent head has been brought to the block, while the guilty one has escaped?"

"We do, indeed," answered the baron; "and therefore, of course, I never dream, for one moment, of entering into any particulars with Mademoiselle de St. Morin. I only wish to plead my own cause, and to add, in order to show some slight claim upon her attention, that your life is in my power, without in the least degree intending to make use of the means in my hand. May I do this?"

The count smiled bitterly, repeating, "Slight claim! Well, sir, I cannot refuse, but you must not ask me in any respect to urge her. You must not expect that I will make it my request even—that I will express a hope or a wish."

"No," replied the baron; "all I will ask is, that if she comes to you for confirmation of my words—if she says to you that I have told her that your life is in my power—you will reply, that I have told her true; ask nothing, demand nothing of her, leave her own heart to decide; and I call Heaven to witness, if she do decide in my favour, that I will make her the best and most devoted of husbands."

The count paused without reply for a minute or two; and never did a more terrible or painful struggle take place in the breast of a man than that which raged in his during his silence. It was not one feeling simply opposing another; it was not alone that apprehension for himself combated his love and tenderness for Annette; but it was, that various feelings and passions took part against

each other in his breast at once, and fears of disgrace and shame, affection for Annette, hatred and contempt for the baron, repugnance to sink himself in the opinion of the person he loved best on earth, and high and noble principles of what was just, and right, and dignified; all arrayed themselves on the one side or the other, and maintained for those few minutes a fearful conflict in his heart.

Apprehension, however, triumphed; more by its old and rooted power in his mind than anything else. That fear had been the bugbear of his life, the spectre which haunted him, the incubus which crushed down all his joys; and he found that he had no power to resist it now.

"It must be as you wish," said the count, at length; "but I have your promise, your plighted word, your pledge, that you will say nothing of this matter to her; that you will give her none of the particulars; that you will never, never call up a suspicion in her mind against me."

"Never," replied the baron; "never, if she consents to be mine. I will say but what I have told you; I will tell her merely that your life is in my power."

"Well," then said the count; "well, I can but leave it to herself; it is a sacrifice I will not ask, I will not demand; but if she decides for herself, why should I oppose? Let her judge: it were cruelty to her to deny her the power of judging, where the life of one whom she loves as a father is at stake."

Did this reasoning satisfy him? It would seem not; for, in the end, a sort of sarcastic smile came upon his countenance, as if he scorned himself for using such sophistry; and then a look of deep melancholy succeeded it, of bitter, dark, remorseful sorrow; and pressing his hand upon his brow, he slowly left the room.

"Pray, call Mademoiselle de St. Morin, hither, my good friend," he said, entering the cabinet in which the surgeon was seated. "I wish to speak to her for a moment or two alone."

Annette came quickly, and the count was glad that she did so, for every instant of expectation was terrible. Her eyes instantly rested on his countenance, and she exclaimed, "You are ill, my dear father! Oh! what is the matter? That base man has agitated and offended you, I am sure!"

"No, no, my Annette," replied the count, shrinking from the terms of condemnation by which she designated him to whom he seemed driven to consign her for life. "No, my Annette, no; perhaps he may not mean it. But no, I will not say a word more in his favour," he added, more firmly. "Go to him, Annette; you will find him in the saloon. Hear what he has to say to you, and then decide for yourself. Let no other consideration but the feelings of your own heart affect you, my child. It is right that you should have the power of judging; but, oh, Annette! oh, judge wisely and well!"

"But tell me," she said, in an agitated voice; "tell me, my dear father —"

"Nay, nay, my dear child," said the count, "ask me no questions; go, decide for yourself. No one can decide but you, no one can decide for you. Would to God that I could!"

Annette stood and gazed at him for a moment or two in painful

silence; then turned, and summoning all her resolution, with a slow, but unwavering step, she sought the saloon in which the Baronde Cajare awaited her.

For a few moments after she had left him, the words which he had spoken, exhorting her to a firm and wise decision, gave some comfort to the mind of the Count de Castelnau. For a time he persuaded himself that he had done his duty, that he had acted as he ought to act towards Annette; but his judgment was too keen and clear, his heart too much accustomed to self-examination, for such a delusion to continue long. A brief, a very brief space of thought, showed him that he was sacrificing her to himself; that he was consigning her to the arms of a man whom she hated and despised; a man who, he himself was confident, would render her miserable for life. He could not deny to his own conscience, that, to accomplish this purpose, he was employing, even while he seemed to leave her free, the most terrible means of compulsion; the compulsion of her heart's best feelings and principles; the compulsion of her affection for him. He felt that it was base; he felt that it was degrading; he felt that he had fallen more than ever in his own opinion; and, burying his eyes in his hands, he shut out all external objects, and the predominant sensation was hatred of himself.

CHAPTER XLIII.

As soon as Annette entered the saloon, the Baron de Cajare advanced towards her, with a countenance from which he had banished every trace of bad passion. It is not to be denied that he was a handsome and a graceful man, and that in his whole address and appearance there was something highly courtly and distinguished; but yet Annette could not behold him without sensations of dislike and apprehension, which certainly were not diminished by the short and unsatisfactory conference she had just held with the Count de Castelneau. She bowed gravely as he approached, but withheld her hand, though he seemed about to take it; and, seating herself in the chair which the count had before occupied, she said, "Monsieur de Castelneau informs me, sir, that you wish to speak to me."

"You cannot doubt upon what subject, Mademoiselle de St. Morin," said the baron; "it must be evident to you, it must have been evident to you before you quitted Castelneau, that I do, and have long loved you sincerely and dearly."

"From all I have known and seen, sir," replied Annette, coldly and even bitterly, for the very profession of his love seemed an offence to her, after the events that had passed—"from all that I have known and seen, the method you have taken to display your love has been somewhat strange; but in one word——"

"Hear me, hear me, first, mademoiselle," said the baron: "hear me, before you make any decision."

"I have none to make, sir," replied Annette; "my sentiments were fixed long ago; but go on, if you think fit."

"Your opinions may have been formed upon wrong grounds," replied the baron; "not that I intend to deny anything that I have done; for every strong passion, if it be not a madness itself, produces a temporary insanity. Mine has certainly done so; for the strongest proof of insanity is the choice of such means as are most likely to defeat the object."

"You reason too calmly, and too well, for a madman, sir," replied Annette; "but whether it were so or not, could make no difference to me now."

The baron bit his lip, but he still replied in the same deferential tone. "I think it might, if you would hear me to an end. In seeking your love and endeavouring to obtain your hand, I have committed many acts which were calculated, I acknowledge, at once to deprive me of your affection and your esteem; but many other things that I have done have been mistaken, and others have doubtless been misrepresented. All, however, have been prompted

by love; by that deep, intense, overpowering attachment which can never be conquered, which will endure through life, and which must eventually produce some return. It is for you to direct that love as you will for the future. It is for you to address it to the best objects, to make it the means of recalling me from anything that is evil; of leading me to all that is high, and noble, and great; of turning me, in short, from wrong to right, and saving me, by the power of affection, from all the vice, and crime, and sorrow, into which, perhaps, disappointment and despair may hurry me."

Annette was now in some degree interested, not touched, not shaken in the slightest degree, for she loved another, and under no circumstances could she ever love him; but she felt grieved for him; and his language had so much the air of truth, that she hoped he might be led to better things.

"Oh! Monsieur de Cajare," she said, in a milder tone, "let me beseech you to think of what ought to be the results of disappointment, especially when that disappointment itself may have been, in some degree, brought about by the very errors and evils into which you now talk of plunging again. Ought it not, oh! tell me, ought it not to chasten and correct? ought it not to make you abhor all that is wrong, and seek all that is right? Alas! I can give you nothing like hope, if you do, indeed, love me as you say. I wish that it were otherwise; I wish from my very heart that it were otherwise; but it cannot be. I do pray and entreat that you would urge me no more, for it is quite impossible."

"I must still urge you, Mademoiselle de St. Morin," replied the Baron de Cajare, somewhat sternly; "for many results that you know not of depend upon your answering my love and becoming my wife."

The altered tone in which he spoke was to Annette rather a relief than otherwise; and she replied, "To end all in one word, sir, then, I have but to tell you that, whatever be the case, you never can or will have my hand; nor can you obtain my love, for it is already given to another. Thus, whatever may be the consequences of my reply, that reply is made."

"Let me first tell you what does hang upon your decision, Mademoiselle de St. Morin," said the baron. "First, there depends upon it the life of the Count de Castelneau; next, his honour; next, his property; next, the fame and name of his whole family and relations."

Annette started up from her seat, and gazed on him with a look of wild incredulity.

"It cannot be!" she exclaimed; "oh, no, it cannot be!"

"It is!" answered the baron, firmly and sternly. "I would not urge this plea till every other argument had failed; but I now tell you that it is so; and if you doubt me, ask the count himself."

"I will, I will," cried Annette, wildly; and darting from the room, like a bird escaped from the hand which has striven to grasp it, she flew to the cabinet where she had left her guardian. She found him, as we have shown, with his eyes buried in his hands; and although he heard the step which, though still light, was now quick and impatient, he raised not his head; he felt that he dared hardly look that pure innocence in the face.

She paused, and gazed upon him mournfully. She read in that downcast aspect—she remembered, in the words that he had spoken to her, and in much that she had seen—dark and terrible signs corroborative of the tale she had just heard. There was a deep mystery, indeed, for her mind, in all that she beheld; but if she asked herself what it could be, what was the meaning of all the strange and unaccountable changes which had taken place in the feelings and demeanour of her guardian, it was with no touch of curiosity, it was with the simple, straightforward purpose of judging what it might be her duty to do, and with the resolution to do that duty at any sacrifice.

She paused, then, and gazed upon the count, scarcely trusting her voice to speak. She knew that the tone thereof—she knew that the very first look—would betray, in a moment, to the eyes of her guardian, the terror, agitation, and despair, which were already in possession of her heart.

The moment of decision was, however, now come; and in that awful moment the high principles and the high soul were not wanting. She called up resolution; she nerved her heart; she determined to face all boldly, to hear all calmly; and if, by the utmost sacrifice that woman could make, she could save him who had devoted so much of his life to the task of rendering her what she was, she resolved to make that sacrifice, should death itself be the consequence. Ah! death itself: for now she concealed nothing from her own mind; and very often, within the last few months, she had thought not only that the grave would be preferable to a union with a man whom she did not love, but that the grave must follow very rapidly upon so terrible, so horrible a fate. She now felt most acutely that such anticipations were not fallacious; that death might anticipate such a union, and could not follow far behind. For that she was prepared; for that she was ready; and the only thing which she miscalculated were her powers of going calmly through the terrible scenes which were to precede that event. She thought that resolution could master everything; and in that belief, after remaining for several minutes in sad and agitated silence, she said, "My dear guardian, my dear father, will you not speak to your Annette?"

The count looked wildly up. "Yes, Annette, yes," he said. "Do not do it, my child!—do not think of it! Reject it at once! Hear not of it!"

"Listen to me, my father," said Annette; "listen to me, I beseech you!"

But while she strove to speak calmly, her voice shook; the hand which she had laid upon his arm trembled violently. "Listen to me, I beseech you, for I am somewhat agitated; somewhat surprised. He tells me—he tells me, that if I refuse to wed him, your life will be the sacrifice!"

The count paused for a moment, gazing in her face, and he then answered, solemnly and slowly, "I must not lie, even for you, Annette: he has said true, my life is in his power. Let me tell you, my dear Annette, let me tell you how all this happened. So help me Heaven! I am as guiltless as the child unborn."

"Hush!" she said, "hush, my dear guardian, tell me nothing.

With me you want no exculpation; I am satisfied of all. Nothing can shake my faith in you. Have I not known you from my infancy? There be proofs, my father, small, silent proofs, in the daily intercourse of confiding hearts, that not the most bitter and condemnatory evidence, and a harsh court of law, can ever outweigh, even by a hair!"

"The count started up, and clasped her in his arms, exclaiming, "Bless thee, my Annette! bless thee, my sweet child!"

"Oh! do not move me," she said, "I am too weak, too much agitated already. Give me, oh! give me calmness, to think and act as I ought. He has your life in his power. Do you think, my guardian, that he will use that power? Do you think that it is quite sure he will attempt to use it?"

"He will, my child," replied the count; "but make me answer no more such questions, my Annette. Since you left me, I have reproached myself bitterly, most bitterly, for subjecting thee to any such painful decision. The moment of feebleness is past. I thank thee, my child, for thy bright and beautiful generosity towards me! I thank thee, not only for thy willingness to save me at a sacrifice of more than life, but I thank thee, also, for having given me back myself, and taught me what is right to do. Dearest Annette, thou shalt make no such sacrifice! Thy fate and fortune, thank God, are already secure: I will meet mine as may best betide me; but I will not pass my child, the beloved child of my adoption, through the fire, as an offering to such a demon as he who demands thee!"

"Nay, nay," said Annette, "can you suppose that I will suffer such a thing? Listen to me, my dear father. Seat yourself there, and listen to your Annette, while she pours forth her whole heart towards you. It is but once in our life, perhaps, that she can do so. Nay, let me kneel;" and as the count sunk back into the chair, she dropped upon her knees beside him.

"Hear me out," she continued: "hear me out: my conduct is determined, fully and resolutely. You know that my heart is already given to another and not to this man, and on that point I will never deceive him; but if he chooses to demand and to receive, as the price of your safety and your peace, this cold and lifeless hand, it shall be his. Of Ernest, I must not, and I dare not speak. His conduct I must not, nor I ought not to blame. He has done his duty, doubtless, to his family and to his station. God provides mitigations for our sufferings even in our griefs: for had Ernest been as devoted to me as I would have been to him, this moment might have been tenfold more terrible than it is now. Hear me, nay, hear me, for in this brief moment, when all is to be decided for ever, with scarcely the slightest pause for thought, it is necessary that I should consider all things: ay, my father, and prepare you for all things. Much agony may, perhaps, be spared me; for neither must I, nor must you suppose, that it is likely I should ever loved this man. Long ere that, if we can so form our plan that the terrible day may be delayed, long ere that, Annette will be wedded to a sterner lord, but one more calm and true. Nay, fear not, my father; I have no rash thoughts, but I trust in God, and know that when in yonder room I pledge myself to be his if I live—at

that instant the fiat goes forth which shall save me from lengthened torture, if it do not relieve me altogether from the obligation of that vow. I know it, I feel it, and I bless God that it is so; for even while he is pleased to afflict me, he gives me the highest and noblest of consolations: the power of showing my love and gratitude towards you. Nay, nay, a few words more; and I pray you do not weep, for I could weep too, and I would fain resist those tears; but let us now speak of things more important. My resolution is taken. Now to secure that it leads to good and not to evil. Let us remember that my hope is in death, not life; and if I die before the day, this man, this false, base man, may still betray you. We must have sureties, we must have bonds, that this terrible thing is not done for nothing. Oh! my guardian, I am too inexperienced in such matters to know what will be security enough: you must judge of that. Come with me, come with me, and fix him firmly to some engagement from which his craft and subtlety cannot escape, otherwise, through life you will be his slave, after Annette is gone. Come with me, for I have not wisdom to deal with things so important; and, to say truth, I feel faint and somewhat dizzy with this agitation."

The count rose from the chair in which, during the last few minutes, he had been seated, with his hand shading his eyes. He had evidently been moved by various emotions; sometimes he had trembled violently; and once the tears had rolled slowly down his cheeks. Latterly, however, he had been very calm, and had no movement whatsoever.

When his hands were now withdrawn, however, the drops were gone from his eyes, though his face was deadly pale.

"Sit down, my Annette," he replied, in a calm tone: "rest here till I return. I will settle the whole matter with the Baron de Cajarc."

Annette, who felt her strength and courage failing, whose heart, now that all was said and done—that the decision was made, and the energy of action passed away—was sick unto the death; Annette did as he told her, and the count took two steps towards the door. In that brief moment, however, the truth flashed upon her mind; she started up, sprang forward, and caught him by the arm. "You shall not refuse him!" she cried; "you shall not refuse him! did I know that, for my sake, you suffered, I should die a thousand and a thousand times in one. Oh, no, no! you shall not refuse him!"

"My child," cried the count, vehemently—"so help me Heaven! with my consent, you never shall be his. Death is an empty name: within ten short years that must be my portion beyond all doubt; and, as for the disgrace, none that the hissing lips and pointed finger of popular error could direct at me would be equal for one moment to the shame, the burning shame, that I now feel, in having, for one instant, thought of sacrificing thee to save my worthless existence. Let me go, my child; let me go to quench this fire that is at my heart."

"Never, never," cried Annette, clinging to him; "never, never, my father; this is my task, this is my duty. Hear me, hear me; oh! I beseech you, hear me. I am willing, I am ready: if you die, I will die with you."

The count unclasped her arms, and broke away, but as he did so Annette fell at his feet upon the floor. The count gazed at her for a moment, but she lay there insensible; and he hesitated whether to leave her and fulfil his purpose at once with the baron, or to stay and endeavour to recall her to consciousness. Tenderness, however, for Annette prevailed, and stooping down, he raised her from the ground. She had become so pale, however, so ghastly was the expression of her countenance, the fainting fit into which she had fallen was so like death itself, that the count became alarmed, and called aloud for assistance.

Good old Donnine hurried quick at her master's voice; some other servants followed; and the loud lamentations which were now made soon called to the chamber not only the surgeon but the Baron de Cajare himself. The count, at the moment he entered, was holding Annette in his arms, and the eyes of the two met. But everything like fear had left the countenance of Monsieur de Castelneau, and he exclaimed aloud, "Get you hence, demon, get hence! You see what you have done. Get you hence, and never let me see your face again!"

"I fear you must *hear from me*, though," Monsieur de Castelneau," said the baron, with a bitter sneer upon his lip: "I fear you must hear from me; and that you shall do right speedily."

"Play what scoundrel part you will, sir," replied the count, "but only rid me of the presence of a villain."

The baron raised his finger with a menacing look, and without more words quitted the room."

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE Baron de Cafate sat in his dressing-room some few hours after the period of his visit to Versailles. He was not by any means so calm and sedate as usual in his demeanour; and the valet who was attending upon him remarked that there was a degree of irritability and impatience in his whole conduct which was very uncommon with him; for, to say the truth, and to do him but justice, in his every-day commerce with the world, he was of a very tranquil and even temper, reserving the display of violent passions for great occasions alone, and even then guiding them with a sufficient degree of power to prevent them from ruffling his manner or disturbing his voice and look. Such, however, as I have just said, was not the case at present, and the reason was very plain. There were two passions active in his breast, not one; neither loved to give way, and they irritated him by the struggle between them. Those two were the same we have before noticed—two of the most violent, if not the most powerful, in the human breast—love and revenge; and they were also the two most strong in his own nature and character; however strange it may seem to say that such a man was capable of love. Still so perverse a thing is human nature, so strange and so wild are the alliances which take place between different passions in our breast, that his interview with Annette during that morning had increased both his attachment to her and his determination by some means to obtain her. Vanity armed herself in the same cause as love; and pride, unconquerable pride, only bowed the head for the purpose of triumphing more completely.

Towards the Count de Castelneau, however, his feelings were very different. There, unmitigated hatred and the thirst for vengeance were predominant; and sooner or later to work his destruction, and take a terrible account of every sarcastic look and cutting word that the count had directed towards him, was his firmest and strongest resolution; still, how to gratify both these passions was a question of great difficulty, which troubled him sorely to solve. The desire of revenge, was, if anything, the stronger of the two; and he revolved in his mind, with bitter pleasure, the thought of giving up the Count de Castelneau to justice, and of making his sufferings and his shame a means of driving Annette to his own purposes. Perhaps there might even be a dark expectation and desire in the bottom of his heart, of obtaining her hand, by holding out the hope of saving her guardian's life, and then of punishing her for her coldness, by disappointing that hope, and leaving him

to his fate. Such, there is reason to suppose, were the purposes which he longed to accomplish; and though the complication of feelings from which those purposes arose were most strange, yet it is no less true that hatred, and revenge, and love, were all mingled together, and that in his evil heart there existed a passion for Annette de St. Morin, which we are forced to call love, combined with the desire of wounding and grieving its object. To accomplish such things, however, it was necessary that he should possess more information than he already had obtained, and that he should win the dark, low scoundrel, from whom he had derived his first intelligence of the assailable point in the Count de Castelnau's character, and render him a mere tool in his hands. To do so was most difficult, however, for the desperado was as shrewd and keen as he was unprincipled and base. Bribery, indeed, was the only method to be employed with him; but then no reliance could be placed on him when he was bribed; no one could reckon for an hour that some superior temptation would not lead him to betray any trust reposed in him; and though the Baron de Cajare, to obtain his object, would have made any sacrifice of mere money that could be made, though he would have invited cupidity, and glutted the desires of the ruffian in his service, yet he well knew that the wealth of the Count de Castelnau enabled him to command far greater means; and that, therefore, if Pierre Jean chose to apply to him, and to extort from that nobleman large sums as the price of silence, vengeance and love might both be disappointed. His first object, therefore, was to bind the ruffian to him by such ties as it would be his interest to keep inviolate, and his next, to prevent any actual communication between Pierre Jean and the count. For this double purpose he had already sent for him; and he now sat waiting with an eager and impatient mind, revolving all his dark schemes, and giving himself alternately to the one and the other of the impetuous passions which struggled in his bosom.

In the meanwhile, his valet aided to dress him with scrupulous exactness; for the money which was to be the bribe of his base agent was yet to be obtained, at least in part, and the means which the baron had to employ in order to gain it, led him naturally into that society where luxury and ostentation were carried to the highest possible pitch. Before he was completely dressed, Pierre Jean himself appeared; and although the valet was, in his master's opinion, one of those old and tried servants of his will, who might be safely trusted with many a delicate secret, yet the baron dismissed him on this occasion, and proceeded with his toilette unaided.

As he went on, he detailed to Pierre Jean all that had occurred at Versailles; but, to his surprise, he found that his companion's view of the progress he had made was very different from his own. Pierre Jean declared that nothing could be more favourable than the result; asked whether he could expect the count and the young lady to yield all at once: and, as revenge, for the mere sake of vengeance, without anything to be got by it, was to the eyes of the sharper mere vanity and folly, he could not at all understand why the baron dwelt so much upon the bitter and insulting conduct of the Count de Castelnau.

"Why, it seems to me," he replied, to some angry observations

of Monsieur de Gajare, "it seems that the old gentleman did as much as could be expected on the first trial. Fear is a thing that one must not make too much of in one's dealings, for if pushed too hard it cures itself. A man gets angry, and forgets his fear altogether; but it has one great advantage over every other sort of means, for it does not wear out, and may be used again and again every day; each day driving on the matter you aim at a bit more and a bit more, till it is all accomplished. Now you see this morning you pressed the count somewhat too hard, and made the man angry, as well he might be; but just let me go to him to-morrow, and I'll bring the matter round, I'll warrant ye."

This proposal, as we have already shown, did not at all accord with the baron's views, and he therefore answered "No, no, my good friend, I have determined upon a different course. I will punish this Count de Castelneau, and marry the young lady too; but if we can arrange our matters properly, before to-morrow at this hour the count shall be in the Chatelet."

"That may suit your views, monsieur le baron," replied Pierre Jean; "but I do not see how it would agree with mine. Now the money is to be paid to me, you know, when you marry this pretty Annette; but if you put the count in the Chatelet, you will never marry her at all. As long as this little business of the count's is a secret, we have some influence over him; but the moment that you have made the charge public, you lose your power, for you have done your worst. No, no, my good friend the baron, that's a bad card: don't play it till you have got no better."

"But suppose," replied the baron, "it should be as pleasant to me to punish this Count de Castelneau as to marry Mademoiselle de St. Morin, what say you then?"

"Why, I suppose such a thing is possible," said the man, "though it's very foolish; but, at the same time, that wouldn't make it suit me a bit the better."

"I am not quite so foolish as you think," answered the baron, "as I will show you in a few minutes; and as for your part of the transaction, I can make it suit you just as well; for if I pledge myself to pay you the same sum on the condemnation of the count, as I was to pay on my marriage with the lady, the matter will, of course, be equal to you."

"I do not know that exactly," replied the man; "I do not want to hurt the count. The girl was very civil to me when I was bringing her up from Castelneau, and had such a winning way with her, that she had almost turned my head, and made me do a very silly thing. So I would rather show her a kindness than an unkindness; and though it is no great kindness, indeed, to marry her to you, yet I suppose she would not be much worse off than most women. Poor devils! we lead them hard lives of it, any how. But let me hear your plan farther, my good friend the baron. You spoke just now as if you intended to marry her, after all; now, how is that to be brought about? I must see my way clearly, you know."

"Why thus, then," said the baron: "I will tell you the general points, Master Pierre Jean; but, having done so, remember I intend to have the whole management of the matter in my own

hands, if you are to have your reward at all. In the first place, I propose to lodge my information against the count with the police to-morrow. You are, on your part, to keep yourself quiet and out of the way till the proper time, and to obey my directions in everything. Having then shown the girl that I am in earnest, I will tell her that the count's life depends upon me; that if she will immediately give her hand, I will set the count free."

"Stay, stay, stay!" cried Pierre Jean; "how will you manage that?"

"By suppressing your evidence, and sending you out of the country," replied the baron.

"It is a pleasant place, Paris," said Pierre Jean. "I am not fond of travelling, for my own part. I am a domestic man, and fond of my own home, and never like going abroad except upon matters of business."

"I understand you," rejoined the baron, bitterly; "but you do not, of course, suppose that I am such a fool, in dealing with a rascal like you, not to calculate his price to a farthing, beforehand?"

"You are a wise man, baron," answered Pierre Jean, "and not a fool; but between buyers and sellers, you know, there may be a difference as to the price. Now what do you think I should require for going abroad?"

"I do not know," replied the baron; "but I know what it will suit me exactly to give; and in order to make no mistake, I have put all the items upon this scrap of paper beforehand, that we may come to the point at once. If I require you to go abroad, you know, it will be when my marriage with Mademoiselle de St. Morin is secure; so you will then have, in the first place, your five thousand louis: now what do you demand more?"

"Ten thousand crowns," replied the roundel.

"There," said the baron, pointing to a line in a paper which he held in his hand, "you see I have put down that sum beforehand."

"I am delighted to find," answered Pierre Jean, "that you have a just appreciation of my abilities; and now for the other articles, monsieur le baron."

"Well, then," replied the baron, "I am ready, at once, to give you the five thousand louis if the count be condemned, or if I marry the young lady. Ten thousand crowns in addition, if I am obliged to send you from the country; and one hundred crowns each day that the business is going on from the period of my laying the information till the whole is settled one way or the other; but solely upon condition that you obey my orders to the letter; that you go nowhere but where I permit you to go, and that you give me full and complete information as to all that you know."

"For which I am to have," added Pierre Jean, "the sum of five hundred livres to spend this night in a grand carouse with my friends?"

"So be it," said the baron. "Are we agreed?"

"Why, I have one slight objection left," replied Pierre Jean. "That Monsieur Morin—that troublesome Monsieur Morin—gave me notice the other day that I had better not interfere with things that do not concern me; for that there was a noose round my neck

which might soon be jerked up. He was speaking of this very affair at the time, and it was that he aimed at, I am sure."

"Ha!" said the baron, "then we must be on our guard against him. What! you think he warned you not to impeach this man? That might be a severe charge against Monsieur Morin himself."

"Meddle not with him, monsieur le baron, meddle not with him," cried Pierre Jean. "No man ever meddled with him yet that did not repent it. There is but one man in all France whom I fear, and he is the man."

"Nevertheless," replied the baron, "we must have that charge of partiality behind our hand, in case he interferes in any way with our proceedings. In the first place, however, you will see my plan already answers well, for I intend to make the charge in my own name, and not in yours, reserving my witnesses till the cause is tried. Should it be necessary to bring you forward at all, the first part of your evidence will show, if I understand you aright, that you have already spoken with this Pierre Morin on the subject, and that he has neglected his duty in not instituting immediate inquiry."

"Why, bless you, my good friend the baron," exclaimed his saucy companion, "Pierre Morin knows the whole business as well as I do. There's nothing takes place in France that he does not know, indeed, and of that affair, of course, no one knows so much; for it was upon his evidence that two of the men were convicted and executed. He shut them both into a room, and kept them there till the police came. How he happened to let the other one out I cannot tell; but certain it is, that there was a third man with them as they went towards Piteau's house, at the very time and hour the old man was murdered. I cannot doubt that the third man went to the very door with them, for I saw him; and it is not less sure that that third man was the Abbé de Castelneau. The reason of his letting him off is clear enough. Before that time, the abbé had adopted his daughter."

"Ay, and that is the reason, too," said the baron, "why he now attempts to screen him from justice! But if I have my will," he muttered, in a low voice, "the sword of justice shall fall on his own head. I will to the lieutenant himself, and tell the whole story to his private ear. I will go thither directly."

"The lieutenant-general is ill," replied Pierre Jean, "he has been ill for a long while now; and everything passes through this man's hands."

"He is not so ill as to refuse to see me," rejoined the Baron de Cajare; "I will go to him immediately. I would give this right hand to break that Pierre Morin on the same wheel where the Count de Castelneau shall perish."

"You will be too rash, my dear baron, you will be too rash," replied Pierre Jean; "you will ruin us all, if you don't mind, by giving way to your temper. However, do not start up in such a hurry! Remember, you have two little things to do for me before you go. First, to draw up a certain paper embodying all the particulars upon which we have agreed; for all must go on safely, my good friend. I must have all my rewards and recompenses written clearly down; and you may put anything you like into the agree-

ment, on your part, which you may think will bind me up tight. Come, my good friend, it must be done before we part, so it may be as well to do it at once; for until that paper is signed, I shall consider myself as free to do what I like."

This sort of freedom, however, was not at all that which the baron wished Pierre Jean to enjoy; and, hurried on by the eagerness of passion, he would have consented to anything rather than forego the opportunity for revenge which seemed now opened before him. He accordingly sat down to draw up the paper, but, notwithstanding his hasty eagerness, it occupied considerable time; for the baron strove hard to avoid entering into particulars, and Pierre Jean would pass nothing whatsoever that was not distinctly specified. The promised reward for every act to be performed was marked with perfect exactness; and it cannot be denied that the passions of the Baron de Cajare, with all his wit and cunning, led him to draw up a document which placed him greatly in the power of the man with whom he was dealing. "And now, Master Pierre Jean," he said, "before I give you these five hundred lîvres, you will recollect that you are to return to this house before midnight. I will have a room prepared for you, where you can remain with comfort and convenience. There you must continue, well taken care of, during the whole of each day, and never go forth without my permission. If you put your foot over the threshold, you lose your hundred crowns for that day."

Pierre Jean consented without the least hesitation; but it must not be thence inferred that he had any intention whatsoever of keeping one of the promises he made a moment longer than was pleasant and expedient for him to do so. The baron certainly had the strongest tie upon him that he could have, which was that of mercenary interest. By it, he thought he could do everything, indeed; but he had yet to learn that there is no bond that is binding upon a man without principle. Suspicion, indeed, which sad experience forces even upon the virtuous and the good after long commerce with the world, is never absent from the wicked and the base; for their own hearts supply the most convincing proof of that treachery and deceit which they guard against in others. Thus, nothing like confidence could ever dwell in the bosom of the Baron de Cajare, and he did, of course, entertain the most lively doubts of the low companion of his iniquity; but he was obliged to content himself by taking the best precautions that he could; and the moment Pierre Jean had received the money and departed, the nobleman called his valet, and ordered him to have the man followed, and all his actions watched. The valet bowed low, in his usual grave and silent manner; but the baron thought that he perceived the slightest possible smile curling his lip, and from that moment he suspected him also.

CHAPTER XLV.

"I AM afraid," said the surgeon, as he bent over Annette, "that I must open a vein. This seems to me to be no common fainting fit, but the stunning effect of some terrible agitation. It can do no harm to take a little blood, and must, at all events relieve the heart."

"Hush!" cried the count, who supported her head upon his arm, "she revives;" and as he spoke, a sort of faint shudder passed over the fair form that lay pale and deathlike before their eyes.

"Who is that ringing the great bell so furiously?" demanded Monsieur de Castelnau the next moment, speaking in a low voice to one of the servants. "Go to the porter and see; and if that villain, the Baron de Cajarc, be returned on any pretence, drive him forth with blows, and say I bade you. My Annette, my sweet Annette! See, she opens her eyes. Be comforted, my beloved child; all will go well."

Annette raised her hand faintly to her head, and looked languidly round for a moment or two, then suddenly fixed her eyes upon the door, and clasped her hands together with an expression in which joy and pain were strangely mingled. At the same instant there was a quick and hurried step in the room, and Ernest de Montfort rushed in and cast himself on his knee beside her.

"My Annette!" he exclaimed, catching her hand, and pressing his lips upon it again and again; "my beloved Annette! They have wounded and grieved you: they have well nigh killed you! I see it: I see it, my own, my beloved bride. But the grief and the pain are over, my Annette; the agony that we have both suffered is past. I have found my father, as I knew I should find him, eager, anxious that you should be mine. He bids me tell you, dear one, that if he could have chosen from the whole world for his son's happiness, he would have chosen none but you. He bids me say that there is no obstacle, no hesitation, not a shade of doubt. Nay, dear Annette, nay," he continued, "why do you turn from me towards the count, with such a look of agony and grief? What has happened? Surely, surely, Monsieur de Castelnau will not object?"

"Far from it, Ernest," replied the count, taking Annette's hand and placing it in his: "she is yours, she is ever yours!"

"Oh no!" exclaimed Annette, in a faint voice, withdrawing her hand. "I promised—I promised, but now! Oh Heaven! this is terrible!"

"You promised nothing, my Annette," said the count: "all that

is at an end, and for ever. I myself have terminated all that, and he is gone."

"But you, but you?" cried Annette, "but you, my father! what will become of you?"

"Mind not me," replied the count. "What is done, is done, Annette. Before this time it is all beyond recall, and were it not, I would make it so even now."

Annette covered her eyes with her hands and wept, while Ernest de Nogent gazed alternately upon her and upon the count with a look of grief, and surprise, and disappointment.

"I had hoped," he said, at length, "to have communicated to you, dear Annette, part at least of the joy that I myself felt. It is very, very sad to find that my coming seems to give you more pain than pleasure."

"Oh! say not so, Ernest, say not so," cried Annette, clasping his hand in her own eagerly. "You cannot tell what it is I feel! you cannot tell how I am circumstanced."

"Will you not give me some explanation, then?" asked Ernest de Nogent.

"I fear I must forbid any such thing at present," said the surgeon, interfering: "it is only too requisite that Mademoiselle de St. Morin should be kept perfectly calm and tranquil for a time."

"Nay, nay," rejoined the count, "nothing will calm her so much as a full explanation with Monsieur de Nogent. Let us but pause for a few moments, till she has recovered some strength. Now, my good friends," he added, speaking to the servants, "now, all but Donnine had better leave the room."

His orders were obeyed; and all that the surgeon though necessary for the purpose of restoring Annette completely was done as speedily as possible. The moments that intervened, indeed, were moments of deep anxiety to all, except the Count de Castelneau, whose resolution was by this time taken, and who watched Annette's looks eagerly, till at length her natural colour returning, though but faintly, to her cheek and lips, he said, "Now, my dear Annette, can you bear this explanation?"

"Oh! yes," she answered, "if it may be given; if it ought to be given, it would relieve me more than anything; for Ernest would counsel, and assist, and support us. But think, my father, oh, think! can you give that explanation to any one?"

"I can, dear Annette," replied the count; "for it will soon be given by others, if not by me. My mind is made up also: my conduct is determined. I will shake this weight from my heart which has rested so long upon it, which has been my burden through life, and has well nigh pressed me down into the grave. It is but right, too, my Annette, that he should know all, and the sooner it is told the better. Are you prepared my beloved child?"

"Oh! yes," she said: "nothing can be such anguish as to think that Ernest may doubt or suspect me."

"Doubt or suspect you, dear one!" said Ernest, pressing her hand in his. "Who that knows you could do so for a moment? I see that something terrible has occurred that I do not understand, and the suspense has been very painful to me; but still

my Annette, if there be anything that you would prefer unsaid, let it not be told on my account; nor suppose, for one moment, that suspicion, or fear, or doubt of any kind will linger in my heart."

Annette extended her hand to him, and looked towards the count, with a glance that seemed to ask, "Is he not worthy of my love?"

Every one having left the room except the three persons most interested, the count paused for a moment, looking down fixedly on the floor, and then raising his head, he detailed to Ernest de Nogent, with his usual calm tone and clear perspicuous brevity, the principal points of all that had occurred during the morning. He did not conceal Annette's willingness to devote herself for him; but he connected it at once with her belief that Ernest himself had forsaken her: and he added a few brief but powerful words, displaying the agony of mind which she had suffered, and the certainty she had felt that death would terminate her sufferings before the sacrifice was completed.

Ernest de Nogent listened with painful interest, and Annette's tears flowed fast at the recapitulation. At length, however, at the allusion made to his silence, Ernest exclaimed, "I have been foolish, very foolish; I ought to have written at once, but I wished to hear to my dear Annette immediately the assurance that my father's willing consent was given. I knew he would give it; I was confident that he would not hesitate for a moment; and therefore it was I set out at once for Castel Nogent without writing, that I might not pain and agitate her by long expectation. But now, Monsieur de Castelneau," he continued, "may I be permitted to know what is the terrible secret possessed by this base man, in order that we may judge how to deal with him?"

The count gazed upon him with a melancholy smile, and replied, "Your appearance and coming hither this day, my young friend, have relieved my mind of part of its load. Whatever befalls me, the happiness of this dear girl will be secure. To you I give her, to you I trust her! It is a precious and a sacred charge; but I know that you will never fail me, and therefore I repose in confidence on you. As for the rest, my conduct was determined before you came, and it is now more firmly fixed than ever. I will tell you what is this secret; for I am resolved, when this villain makes his charge against me, to relate the whole tale simply and truly, and then to abide the consequences, be they what they may. I know my own innocence, though I cannot prove it; and God knows my innocence, too, who may better make it appear.

"It is now more than eighteen years ago that the circumstances occurred on which this man will found his charge. I was then, Monsieur de Nogent, in the prime of life; past the first rash epoch of youth, in the full vigour of body and mind, and without one faculty or feeling in the least decayed. According to the usual acceptance of the word, I had been well educated, for I had been instructed in various sciences, I had acquired much knowledge of different kinds, and I was as learned as most men, be their profession what it may; but in the true and real sense of the word I was ill-educated; for I had been taught no moral restraint, I had

gone through none of the discipline of the heart. 'I was sent forth, in fact, to educate myself. It was as if arms were put into my hands, and I were bidden to use them, without being told how. Cast upon the world early, and holding many of those rich benefices which are most scandalously given to men who are not, in fact, churchmen, the means of various sorts of gratification were open to me, and life was the great experiment, which I hastened forward to make, without experience and without fear. I visited many countries, went through many scenes, and did many acts, on the details of which I need not dwell. I had strong passions, and I indulged them in various ways; but the indulgence was not altogether merely for the sake of vicious gratification; it was rather in pursuit of something higher, better, nobler, which I had not yet found. I was seeking for happiness, in short, but my search was without a guide; though I fancied that philosophy was leading me. I believed that the only real way to discover in what happiness consisted was to taste all enjoyments, to endeavour to separate the ingredients of every pleasant cup, and to take from each the elements which satisfied me most. You may judge yourself what was the result, both upon my character and upon my fortune. At the end of a few years, the first was deeply injured, the second ruined altogether. The effect upon my mind and heart alarmed me more than all the rest. I felt that the state of false and unsatisfactory excitement in which I lived was producing a habit that I could not cast off; a craving for the same stimulating food grew stronger and stronger every day. I struggled against it; I made efforts to free myself; I proposed to my spirit calmer pleasures, gentler, more virtuous enjoyments. Some of these schemes I even put in practice, and, amongst the rest, for my earthly blessing and my eternal salvation, I adopted this sweet child, the softener of my heart, the purifier of my mind, the sanctifier of all my feelings to nobler and to holier things. But while God granted me a blessing, he also gave a warning and a punishment. I have said that my fortune was ruined: I was endeavouring to retrieve, to save some small thing out of the wreck of all, to give me the means of educating and providing for the child of my adoption. There was a prospect of success; but ever, when a man is poor, the world presses on him the more hardly; and adversity, like a dog who has hunted down a deer, seizes him by the throat every time he tries to struggle up. My creditors pressed hard upon me; and those to whom I had lent sums of money were rarely found in circumstances to repay them. Amongst other claims against me, was a debt to a man named Fiteau, a hard, cold-minded old man; who suddenly called for his money, and I was obliged to pay him, though it left me penniless in the world. In that evil hour I encountered in the street two old acquaintances, of no very high or pure character. They were both men of rank, and had once been men of fortune, but were now as poor as myself in purse, and, I may venture to say, much poorer still in principle. One of them, the Count H. owed me a considerable sum, but I was quite hopeless of his ever discharging the debt. He had given me a bond for it; but I knew him to live, as so many other men do live in Paris, solely by the proceeds of the gaming-table. I met him, however, and the Chevalier de M. just towards

dusk, on the evening of a bright April day, and in the pain and anxiety of the moment, I told them what had just occurred with this Gaultier Fiteau. When I came up I remarked something peculiar in the manner of both. They had been talking vehemently and eagerly together, but in low tones, and as soon as I approached became silent at once. The count seemed to fancy that what I said regarding Fiteau had for its object to make him pay me the sum he owed me; and he replied with a peculiar smile that I shall never forget—

“Well, well, my dear abbe, wait till to-morrow, and perhaps I shall be able to discharge the whole.”

“Nonsense, count,” I answered; “why, you are well nigh as poor as I am, and, of course, I do not expect any payment.”

“Ay, but I expect to receive a large sum,” he said.

“From some lucky hit to-night?” I asked.

“Perhaps so,” he said, with that same peculiar smile; “but it is a very sure hit too.”

“I declare,” I replied, “I would try my luck once more myself, but this rascally goldsmith has not left me a louis.”

My two companions spoke a few words to each other in a quick, low voice, and then the count turned to me, and said, “Come with me, my dear abbe; come with me, and I will pay you a part or what I owe you to-night. I am going to old Fiteau’s myself, to make him give me some money on my diamond snuff-box, and you shall have a part.”

“A thousand thanks,” I answered; “a thousand thanks! It will, indeed, be of great service.”

“We then walked on together, and, as we went, my companions more than once spoke to each other apart. The count seemed to propose something, but the chevalier still replied, ‘No, no, it would ruin all.’ When we had crossed over the bridge, and were approaching the old goldsmith’s shop, to my surprise the count and his companion turned back, saying that it was not dark enough; but they afterwards explained the matter by adding, that they did not want to have any one in the shop when they offered the snuff-box. Shortly afterwards we returned; and as we were going down the street in which Fiteau lived, we saw his shop-boy, whom I knew well by sight, come out; and the count, saying, ‘That is he,’ crossed immediately to the other side. We now proceeded very slowly up to the door of the shop, which was closed; and the count muttering, ‘This is a disagreeable business, I hope there is nobody with him,’ paused for a moment or two as if in hesitation. I laughed at his scruples, and offered to go in and get the money for the box myself, but he said, ‘No, no, I will do it, if you will just stay here, and if you see any one coming, call to me immediately, for I should not like to be caught pawning my snuff-box.’

“I replied, ‘Very well!’ and he then turned to the chevalier, saying, ‘Go you in first, and see if there is any one there. Perhaps the old man is gone home himself.’ But the door was not locked. The chevalier went in, and I heard him speak to the old goldsmith. The count followed a moment after, the door was closed, and I remained upon watch. I took a turn up the street,

which was now dark, and though I thought the conduct of my two companions somewhat strange, not a suspicion of any evil purpose crossed my mind. At that moment I happened to clasp my hands together, thinking of my own situation, and wishing I could get out of Paris. In so doing, my left hand rested upon the seal-ring which I wore upon my right, and which was richly set with diamonds. 'I will sell this,' I thought as I touched it; 'it is worth fifty louis. I will sell this, and quit Paris at once.' I drew it from my finger with the intention of doing so immediately, for the thing had never struck me before, and I turned towards the door of the shop. As I came near, I suddenly heard a noise of struggling, and then a sound as if some heavy weight had fallen, and then a shrill cry, almost instantly stifled. A horrible suspicion now, for the first time, crossed my mind. In the agitation of the moment, and with my whole brain reeling, I dropped the ring which I had taken from my finger, but, without seeking it, I darted towards the door. At that instant, however, a man rushed forth, and I eagerly asked what had happened, thinking he was one of the two who had just left me; when suddenly, to my horror and astonishment, I saw that he was a stranger, and in the first impulse of the moment I fled at full speed. When I reached my own dwelling, I recollected the ring, but I dared not go back to look for it, and I passed some time in a state of apprehension and suspense that it is impossible to describe. Nothing, however, took place to increase my fears. The trial passed without my name being mentioned. I found that the man whom I had seen come forth from the house where the murder had been committed, and who, by his gallantry and determination, brought the assassins to justice, was the very Pierre Morin, the reputed father of my Annette. But he never mentioned my appearance throughout the whole course of the affair, and the two murderers suffered the horrible sentence of the law without any one having whispered a suspicion against me. On the very day of the execution, however, I received a letter, sealed with the very seal I had lost, commanding me, in terms which left no doubt that the writer possessed my secret, to quit Paris without delay; but, at the same time, that very letter enclosed the means requisite for obeying the injunction. More than once since I have received a letter so sealed; and in every instance except the last, I have obeyed to the letter the directions given me. On the last occasion, those directions implied that I was to say to the Duke of Choiseul words which I thought might deceive him concerning the birth of my dear Annette. I determined not to utter them; and it is clear that in consequence of my acting, as I thought, justly and rightly, this Pierre Morin, who is now, I find, chief commissary, has given over the secret to the Baron de Cajare."

"Oh, no, no!" exclaimed both Annette and Ernest de Nogent at the same moment; "it cannot be; he would never do that."

"Ay!" said the Count; "how can you judge, my dear Annette? What can you know of this Pierre Morin? Ay, now I remember,"

he continued; "the gentleman you saw in the wood! but still no one else could have done it, my dear child; for no one could give such information but himself."

"We cannot tell that, Monsieur de Castelneau," said Ernest de Nogent; "but sure I am, it is not Pierre Morin; I know him well; and although he is generally held to be strict and severe in his dealings with the villanous crew of this metropolis, I have always found him generous and kind, and one who weighs a man's motives as well as his actions. However, the conduct of this Baron de Cajare is base and shameful; and if it can be shown that he has used such threats for such purposes, it will go far to destroy any charge that he may bring. He cannot long have left you, Monsieur de Castelneau?"

"Scarcely an hour," replied the count, pointing to a clock on the mantelpiece.

"Well, then," continued Ernest de Nogent, "I will hasten after him with all speed; and, seeing the commissary of police myself, I will endeavour to discover what share he has had in this business."

The count shook his head. "Alas! my young friend," he observed, "I fear your experience is not sufficient to render you a match for the shrewd and veteran director of the Parisian police."

"Perhaps I may not be able to discover all," replied Ernest, "but I may discover something; and at all events, I shall weaken this bad man's testimony, by charging him directly with having threatened you with such an accusation, for the purpose of driving you, against your inclination and hers, to give him the hand of my dear Annette. My horses are fresh: I shall reach Paris almost as soon as himself. Were it not better," he added, addressing the count in a low tone, "were it not better for you, my dear sir, to order your carriage at once, and put the frontier between you and Paris ere daybreak to-morrow? The accusation is false, but the result of such things is always uncertain. Justice does not always in France, alas! hold the scales very even. You have no protection at the court now, Monsieur de Castelneau. Were it not better, I say, to be absent; to be beyond the reach of enemies?"

"No," answered the count; "no. As I have said, my young friend, my determination is taken. It is too late to-day to set out for Paris, but early to-morrow I will myself go to the lieutenant-general of police. I will tell him of the threat which this trader in human hopes and fears has used against me; and, relating the whole facts as I have now told them to you, I will show him that I am ready to answer the charge whenever it is brought before him. Thus there can be no use of your going to Paris this night. Stay here with us, Ernest, and pass this evening at least in one of those happy dreams whereof this stormy life has but few; stay, to console and comfort Annette, for she has needed consolation this many a day, and has not found it."

Ernest de Nogent gazed fondly at Annette for a moment, and pressed her hand in his; but he answered, "The best consolation I can give her is in aiding you; nor, indeed, could our dream be a happy one under such circumstances as now surround us. Dear Annette, I ought to go to Paris; I ought to go immediately, without hesitation or delay. I am concerned as well as the count, for this man has striven to rob me of love and happiness for life. I must go: I ought to go."

He rose as he spoke, but Annette rose also; and laying her hand upon his arm, detained him for a moment.

"Ernest," she said, in a sad tone, "there are some things on which, I am told, men consider themselves privileged to deceive women; the most honourable and honest men, Ernest. You are going to fight this man: is it not so?"

"No, I can assure you, dear Annette," he replied; "whatever may be eventually the result, such is not my purpose at present."

"Promise me, then, promise me," said Annette, "that you will avoid a quarrel with him; that you will not draw your sword upon him."

"Not so, dearest Annette," replied Ernest de Nogent, firmly. "Believe me, when I told you, as straightforwardly and truly as you yourself could speak, that I go not with the slightest intention of seeking any quarrel with this Baron de Cajare; that I will rather shun it, if possible. Of this I assure you, my dear Annette; and I am sure that, after having said thus much, you will not seek to bind me by any such promise as you have just asked. Rash promises have but too often sealed a man's sword to the scabbard when honour should have made him draw it, and have brought down imputations upon him which have cost him the sacrifice of life itself to wipe away. I will seek no quarrel with him, Annette; and pray, my beloved one, be satisfied with that assurance."

"I will," said Annette, "I will; for I do not think, Ernest, that however rashly you might hazard life in moments of joy and bright happiness, you would willingly leave me for ever alone in a time of such misery and danger as this."

Ernest de Nogent cast his arms around her and kissed her cheek, and the Count de Castelnau turned away, and walked with a slow step towards the window. He instantly returned, however, and taking Ernest's hand in his, he said, "I thank God most sincerely, that whatever may happen to me, she has such a one to protect her; and now farewell: act well and wisely; for wisdom and truth together will win the day against all odds."

CHAPTER XLVI.

PIERRE MORIN sat alone in his own house, but the fate of ambition had been his, though, to say truth, he as little deserved that fate, from any ambitious feeling in his own mind, as any man that ever lived. Greatness, however, had been thrust upon him: and, as I have said, the fate of ambition had been his. Domestic life was gone; it was no longer by his own fireside he sat: it was in a small office, with the word "*Etude*" marked upon the outer door, with two other entrances on either side, a bell upon the table before him, and innumerable reams of written papers piled up in shelves around, ticketed and marked within view, but closely secured by wirework screens, of which no one had the key but himself. Here he sat, then, reading attentively, by the light of a lamp, a long report, written in very close characters, while ever and anon he laid it down, and seemed to think over the contents, and then again took up the paper, and went on with the same attention as before.

When he had done, he marked a small note of the contents on the outer leaf, put it aside, and turned to a list of memoranda; after looking through which, he rang his bell, and a clerk appeared, after knocking at the door.

"Has the person I told you of been here?" demanded Pierre Morin.

"Yes, sir, and left this paper," replied the man.

Pierre Morin took it, and examined the contents attentively, making a sign, at the same time, for the clerk to remain in the room.

"Ha!" he said, "ha! He has, has he? Well, we will see! Send for an exempt, any one will do, and three archers; and let an exempt and the same number of archers be here at ten o'clock. See who that is ringing the bell."

The clerk went out into the office beyond, and thence into a little vestibule which communicated with the street by a door well secured. There was a small grated wicket in the door, as in the doors of prisons, through which any one within could hold whatsoever communication he wished with those without, and yet be able to put a stop to the conversation whenever he pleased; by closing a wooden shutter over the grating.

Through this wicket the clerk now spoke for a moment to a man in the street, and then returned to tell Pierre Morin that the ringer of the bell was a person calling himself Monsieur de Nogent, who wished to speak with him on business of the utmost importance.

"I know his face, sir," continued the clerk; "he was one of the king's pages of honour a good many years ago, and has since been on service in Flanders and on the Rhine."

"Let him in," said Pierre Morin, "but admit no one else: for I have much fresh business on hand to-night."

The clerk retired, and a minute or two after, Ernest de Nogent entered the room.

"Good evening, Monsieur de Nogent," said Pierre Morin. "Pray, take a seat for a moment or two. I have very little time to speak with any one to-night; a load of fresh business having been cast upon me unexpectedly."

"I should have been here an hour ago," replied Ernest, "had not one of my horses fallen. But the cause of my coming, Monsieur Morin, is of deep importance to me and others, and of some consequence to yourself, perhaps."

"Oh! yes," answered Pierre Morin: "I know all about it, Monsieur de Nogent, though, for once in my life, something has taken place which I did not know, that is, your arrival in Paris. However, I am aware of the affair that brings you here, and it is all in proper train."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Ernest de Nogent. "I think you must be mistaken."

"Oh! no," answered Pierre Morin: "the business is, that our good friend the Baron de Cajare has been threatening the Count de Castelnau with charges of a very serious nature, if he do not choose to give him the hand of Mademoiselle de St. Morin in marriage."

Ernest de Nogent looked astonished, and after a momentary pause, demanded, "Then have you really been the person to furnish this information to the Baron de Cajare? I offered to pledge my life that you had not."

"You did quite right," replied Pierre Morin. "I gave him no information at all; nay, more, within the last three hours, he has gone and charged me to the lieutenant-general with conniving at Monsieur de Castelnau's escape from justice. Is it possible that there can be such a fool as the Baron de Cajare!"

"It does appear to me that he is less foolish than malicious," replied Ernest: "if he thought you would say anything in favour of the count, it was of course his best plan to charge you as an accomplice."

"It is really curious," said Pierre Morin, with a smile, "to see how simple you men of the world can be. Why, did the fool think that the lieutenant-general would bring discredit on the whole office by listening to the tale of a notorious swindler and *intrigant* like himself, against one of the oldest and most tried servants of the police? Why, he would not sacrifice the lowest *mouchard*, that, dressed up as a waiter, listens to the conversation in a low coffee-house, to the enmity of such a villain as this Cajare. Besides,

what could the fool expect, when he roused a man full of gout and rheumatism, and gravel, and Heaven knows what besides, from a nice little supper in his own bed-room, to come and listen to an unpleasant charge against a person without whose assistance he could not keep up his office for an hour? Why, of course, that the good lieutenant would send the whole tidings to me, and bid me deal with the matter as I might think fit."

Ernest de Nogent had smiled at the commissary's method of reasoning, and from the tone in which he spoke, concluded that all would go right for the Count de Castelneau; but Pierre Morin, who was a great decipherer of the transient expressions of men's countenances, read in a minute what was passing in the young gentleman's mind, and hastened to undeceive him.

"Notwithstanding all this, Monsieur de Nogent," he said, "I must not lead you into a belief that the situation of the Count de Castelneau is not a very dangerous one. Here is a grave charge made against him: a charge in regard to which my evidence must be demanded, and not only must I speak the truth, but I have spoken the truth nearly twenty years ago."

"If so," said Ernest de Nogent, "how happens it that the case was not investigated at the time?"

"It is all according to the routine of the office," replied Pierre Morin. "As soon as I was sworn in to the duties of the station then conferred upon me, I informed the lieutenant-general of those days of certain facts concerning Monsieur de Castelneau, which, perhaps, he may not have communicated to you."

"He has told me all," said Ernest de Nogent; "all, I am quite sure, without the slightest disguise."

"Well, then," said Pierre Morin, who, notwithstanding this assurance, did not choose to speak more plainly, "you know what I allude to. I made the communication of all I had seen and heard to the lieutenant-general himself. He took a note of it, which still exists; but nothing farther was done; our ordinary rule being, never to proceed against any person whose guilt is not clear. If we think that this individual or that is going on in a course dangerous to government or to society, we may arrest him, and keep him quiet for a time; but we never proceed to the scandal of public trials and examinations till we are quite sure that a man has committed a crime; unless, indeed, some impertinent fool, like this Baron de Cajare, either from private enmity or mere intrusive folly, forces the matter upon us by a public charge. Such was the case of Monsieur de Castelneau. We could not prove that he was guilty at the time: it was my own private opinion that he was not, and such is still my belief. The lieutenant-general left me to keep my eye upon him, and if I found that there was fresh cause for suspicion, to act as the case might require. Still, I must tell you, the affair is very dangerous for him at present. Here is a new witness come forward in the business, who is not only a villain, but a very cunning villain, and what he may say no one can tell. Neither the king nor his ministers are at all well disposed to Monsieur de Castelneau, and the turn which these things may take can never be ascertained beforehand. Now tell me, Monsieur de Nogent, what does he intend to do? I give you my promise,

that if you will tell me sincerely, I will not use the information against him in any way."

"He intends," replied Ernest de Nogent, "he intends to come to Paris to-morrow morning, to inform the lieutenant-general of the threats which have been used against him, to give every explanation, and to submit himself to whatever may be judged necessary by the police."

"That looks like innocence," said Pierre Morin, after a moment's thought.

"Oh! can you doubt for a moment that he is innocent?" exclaimed Ernest de Nogent. "After a long life of beneficence, kindness, and honour, can you doubt that he is unstained by such guilt?"

"I do not doubt it myself," replied Pierre Morin; and as he pronounced those words, and marked the enthusiastic eagerness of his young companion, a smile came upon his lips, the grave and melancholy smile of sad experience when brought in sudden contact with the freshness of youthful confidence. "I do not doubt it myself," he repeated; "but there may be others who will doubt, and it is that which made me glad he should take a course which looks like innocence; for in this good world it is very often better to look innocent even than to be innocent, whatever it may be in the next. Let him come, but yet with no unseemly haste, as if he feared: I will take care that he shall not be sent for before he appears, so that it may be a voluntary act; that is to say, if I am assured that he will present himself."

"Of that you may be quite certain," answered Ernest de Nogent; "but can nothing further be done to discover how this Baron de Cajare intends to proceed, and to take the sting out of his malice? Oh! that it might rest upon me alone to do so; but sooner or later it may come to that, for I have many a long arrear to settle with him already."

"Hush, hush!" cried Pierre Morin, laughing; "you must not speak of such violent proceedings here, in presence of the police, or I must send for an exempt. But leave the Baron de Cajare to me; depend upon it, I shall prove a more terrible combatant to him than yourself. I rather suspect, Monsieur de Nogent, that if you will have the kindness to wait till I have settled my accounts with him, and after that wish to arrange his affairs with you likewise, you will have to seek him either in the colonies, or else in the galleys at Toulon. The man is a fool, sir; the man is a fool: not simply for offending the chief commissary of police, for that many an honest man has done, and been none the worse for it; but for offending the person who has the chief power of punishing rogues, when he knows himself, as well as I know him, to be one of them: there is the folly, Monsieur de Nogent. I have a great mind, however," he added, "to let him go on a little while longer: for there is something I would fain find out, which, perhaps, I may not be able to lay hold of, unless I let him discover it himself, and yet I think it may be done, too; but I must consider of the matter, and speak, in the first place, with the lieutenant-general of police. It is time that I should go thither, however," he said, looking at his watch, "for we have just three-quarters of an hour before his bed-

time. It may be as well if you go with me too, for this business has annoyed my worthy superior, and it will be better to soothe him and send him to bed quiet, that he may rise in good humour to-morrow. I will soon tranquillise him, and you can then return to Versailles if you think fit. All you will say to the lieutenant-general is to confirm my words in regard to the intention of the count to present himself willingly to-morrow, and you will inquire what hour will be most agreeable for the interview."

Ernest de Nogent willingly agreed to accompany Pierre Morin, and the commissary accordingly took his hat and sword, and led the way through the office where the clerk was seated, into the little vestibule beyond. In that chamber were now standing four men in military habits, to one of whom Pierre Morin spoke a few words as he passed out, and the archers, for such they were, followed him at once into the street. The commissary, however, took no farther notice, but went on, and the archers, with the exempt at their head, pursued a different course. A short walk brought the chief commissary and his young companion to the hotel of the lieutenant-general of the police, where the appearance of Pierre Morin immediately procured admission; and in a few minutes they were introduced into the dressing-room of that powerful officer, who was, perhaps, more feared for fifty miles round the capital than even the king himself. He was at this time not very far advanced in life, but appeared, as Pierre Morin had said, to be eaten up with gout and various diseases. His countenance was anything but pleasing, though probably it had once been handsome; but the irritation produced by wearying sickness was evident in every line, and his first salutation, even to Pierre Morin, was, "Psha! why did you not come sooner, Monsieur Morin? and who have you brought with you here?"

"I could not come earlier, monseigneur," replied Pierre Morin, "because I wished to obtain such satisfactory information, in the first place, as would set your mind perfectly at ease. In regard to myself, monseigneur, I take it for granted that you are satisfied; at all events, if to-morrow you will look in the volume and at the folio I mentioned, you will find my full deposition regarding this business twenty years ago."

"I am satisfied, I am satisfied," said the lieutenant-general, peevishly. "I sent for the volume, and saw the whole thing. I leave it all to you to arrange."

"Nay, monseigneur," said Pierre Morin, "it will be necessary for you, I am afraid, to go into the business yourself to-morrow morning, as I must give evidence, and cannot both bear witness and conduct the inquiry. It will not, however, take half an hour, for everything shall be prepared by me beforehand, and I think you will find, in five minutes, that this charge has been arranged by two swindlers, the chief of whom is the Baron de Cajare, for the purpose of frightening Monsieur de Castelneau, and extorting something from him. At all events, it will be satisfactorily shown to you, whatever may be your judgment in regard to Monsieur de Castelneau himself, that this Baron de Cajare is little better than a common cheat; and his chief witness, if I divine rightly who he is to be, I propose to hang as speedily as possible, if you have no

objection; unless, indeed, he does something to merit a little longer licence."

"Oh! I have no objection," replied the lieutenant-general; "do as you please, Morin, only be certain of what you are about, you know."

"Oh! I am quite sure, sir," replied Pierre Morin; "we shall have him to-night, can hear what he has to say upon this business to-morrow; he may be interrogated upon any of his own affairs—there are six or seven of them—on the day after; his trial can come on upon Saturday, and Tuesday will be a very good day for hanging him, if you have no objection."

"None in the world," replied the lieutenant-general. "Any day you like; it is quite the same to me. But who is this gentleman, Morin?"

"Oh! I beg your pardon, and his also, sir," replied the commissary; "this is Monsieur de Nogent, formerly page of honour to the king." The lieutenant-general rose up in his seat and made a low bow to Ernest de Nogent while Pierre Morin continued: "He has come to wait upon you regarding this business of Monsieur de Castelneau, who sent him immediately to give information of the threat used towards him by the Baron de Cajare, and to inquire at what hour you will be willing to give him audience, that he may meet any charges boldly and at once."

"That is favourable," replied the lieutenant-general, "that is very favourable. As to the hour: what time do you think everything will be ready, Monsieur Morin?"

Pierre Morin approached somewhat closer to the lieutenant-general of police, and said, in a low voice, "You had better name any time you like, sir; your health must be cared for before all things, and you should be guarded against the rawness of the morning air. Perhaps the hour of noon might suit you? I will be responsible that no escape shall take place, though I am sure such a thing is not intended."

"No, not noon, not noon," replied the lieutenant-general; "that is too late. I am always up by ten, and can be down at the bureau by eleven. No, no; we must do our duty, Monsieur Morin, we must do our duty. Let us say eleven o'clock, if you please."

"The count will be quite ready to wait upon you then, sir," said Ernest de Nogent. "He is prepared and willing to give every explanation of the only circumstance on which any charge can be founded against him, knowing that such a charge must be false, and that the more it is investigated the more clearly will his innocence appear."

"I doubt it not at all, sir; I doubt it not at all," said the lieutenant-general; "for this same man who has accused him has had the impudence to charge our faithful and excellent friend here, Monsieur Morin, with conniving at the crime, when the registers of the police show, on the contrary, that he made his declaration of all the circumstances affecting Monsieur de Castelneau between eighteen and nineteen years ago. Thus one part of the charge is evidently false, and a malicious motive is very clear."

Ernest de Nogent bowed his head, replying, "I doubt not, sir, that to-morrow still stronger motives will be displayed; and I am

sure that so wise and experienced a magistrate as yourself will take the character of the accuser and the accused into consideration."

"Assuredly, assuredly," replied the lieutenant-general. "Good night, Monsieur de Nogent; good night, Monsieur Morin; my hour is come for going to bed, and I must have a calm and quiet night that I may wake with a clear mind to-morrow."

Pierre Morin and his young companion took their leave and withdrew; but the commissary of the police made no comment upon the interview which had just passed, merely saying, "I will see you on your way, Monsieur de Nogent. Where do your horses stand?"

Ernest de Nogent told him; and they proceeded with a quick pace through various streets, lanes, and passages, with all the intricacies of which few persons in Paris, except Pierre Morin, were thoroughly acquainted, and which not many could have traversed with safety. He walked on, however, with a calm step, a thoughtful countenance, and eyes fixed upon the ground, without saying a word to his companion, and only raising his face every now and then, as it instinctively, at particular spots, where his glance was sure to meet with some other person, apparently quite idle, whom the commissary sometimes saluted with a nod, sometimes with a "Good-night!" and sometimes with the question of "Anything new?"

The answers were generally as brief; and after passing through a number of narrow streets and turnings, the two gentlemen entered the Rue Tirechapes, which, at the moment, was apparently quite vacant. Here Pierre Morin looked around him, but nothing was to be seen, except a light streaming from one or two of the upper windows, where far above the street—which was at that time the Monmouth Street of Paris—were innumerable receptacles of every sort of vice, known under the familiar name of *tripots*. At the corner of a cross street, where there was a greater blaze than ordinary pouring forth from the high casements, and shining on the houses opposite, Ernest de Nogent observed a party of three or four men, apparently in a very gay mood, issue out from a doorway, and pause to laugh and blaspheme a moment or two before they went on.

At that very instant, however, about an equal number of men darted across from a house of the same kind on the opposite side of the way, rushed into the midst of the group, and seized one of the most prominent talkers by the throat.

The words "*De par le roi*" were just heard; and the rest of the merry party scattered in every direction, making the best use of their legs out of the way of the police. The man, either hot with wine, or courageous from despair, made a momentary effort to cast off his captors; but he was overpowered in an instant and struggled no longer.

Ernest de Nogent had paused; but Pierre Morin walked on without even stopping to look, and only noticed the proceeding by saying to one of the men as he passed, "To my house!" He then led the way forward as before, saying, "That is one bird springed. I must take another to-night; but perhaps I may have to see to

that myself. This is but inferior game. Now, Monsieur de Nogent, I will wish you good-bye, for there, before you, is the place where your horses stand, and we must be both about our business. I shall see you, I suppose, to-morrow, with Monsieur de Castelneau."

"If I may be permitted to come," said Ernest de Nogent.

"Oh! yes, come, come by all means," replied Pierre Morin.

"Good-night, good-night!" and he turned away.

CHAPTER XLVII.

We must change the scene from the dark, gloomy, and narrow Rue Tirechapes; and although the transition may dazzle his eyes, must bring the reader to one of the gayest and most brilliant saloons in the capital city of France. Everything was gold, and glitter, and ostentation; lights innumerable appeared in every part of the three rooms; looking-glasses of large size and the finest polish reflected the blaze; and it was difficult to say which was the most splendid, the clothing of the walls, or that of the personages assembled within them. The company consisted entirely of men, indeed; but the fashion of that day permitted every sort of gaudy colour, and shining decoration, in male habiliments, and certainly none had been spared on the present occasion. The suite of rooms was so divided, that one was appropriated to cards alone, and in it were no less than five tables, each of which was surrounded by players.

Another room had a pharo table and a hazard table; and at the latter were seated several of the most courtly and libertine of the French gamblers. They were not, indeed, of that class of professional sharpers who make their living entirely by the cards or by dice, but they were those with whom gambling was both a passion and a mode, and who were perhaps sometimes the dupes, and sometimes the cheats, as the various circumstances in which they were placed required. At the hazard table, engaged with the Count de Melun, the master of the house, and betting with several of those around, sat the Baron de Cajare. He had a large pile of gold by his side, and nothing could appear more graceful, free, and open, than his demeanour, while sometimes he jested upon his own luck, sometimes observed that this was to compensate for the long run of evil fortune which had befallen him previously.

"Very handsome compensation, indeed," said the Count de Melun; "why, what between the gold you have there, and the notes you have got, you must have won a hundred thousand livres."

The Baron de Cajare looked at a card by his side, and replied with a tone of quiet triumph, "A hundred and fifty-five thousand livres, my good friend."

"Well, one more throw," replied the count, in a somewhat angry tone; "and if I lose that, I shall give it up."

He threw accordingly, but the dice was as much against him in his own hand, as they were in that of the Baron de Cajare.

"Come, St. Paul," he said, "sit you down and try your luck with him. You have won one bet from him to-night, and perhaps may have a better chance. I am sick of it, and will go and try my hand at piquet."

Thus saying, he walked away, and his friend, sitting down at the table with the baron, actually did win from him two or three thousand livres. In the meantime, the Count de Melun passed into the neighbouring card-room, and looked for a moment at some of the piquet tables, but finding that there was no place for him, and to say truth, somewhat out of spirits with the course of his fortune during the evening, he walked on into a third chamber, which was quite empty, and took up a glass of sherbet from a table covered with refreshments. An instant after, a servant entered, and put a very small note into his hand, which the count opened carelessly, but read attentively, and apparently with some surprise. He then raised his eyes, and saw the attendant who had given it, standing at the door waiting for an answer. Advancing with a quiet step towards him, the count said, in a whisper, "Are they below?"

"Yes sir," said the man; "there are four of them."

"Then bring them up," replied the count, "by the back stairs into that cabinet. Keep the door in the smallest degree ajar, and let them come when I call."

The man withdrew instantly, and the count re-read the note attentively. Then folding it up, and placing it under one of the dishes on the table, he sauntered quietly into the card-room again, and leaned against the mantelpiece, where he could see, through the open door, all that passed at the hazard table in the third chamber.

"Now, will you take my place, Melun?" said one of the piquet players.

"No, I thank you," replied the count; "I am out of luck to-night, but I shall go back presently and have another throw with Cajare." Thus saying, he continued gazing into the other room towards the table where the baron and St. Paul were still playing at hazard. Sometimes, indeed, he turned away and stared, it seemed, listlessly, into one of the large looking-glasses behind him. Still, however, in averting his head he sought to escape the sight of the growing wealth of the Baron de Cajare, whose fortune had only wavered for a moment, to return with brighter smiles than ever. The Count de Melun was not successful, for the looking-glass presented just the same scene when he turned the other way, and in it were seen the back of the baron with a pile of gold and notes increasing every moment, and the face of Monsieur de St. Paul, expressive of no great satisfaction in his game. After this state of things had continued for about a quarter of an hour, the Count de Melun sauntered slowly up to the hazard table, and placed himself by the side of Monsieur de St. Paul.

"I wonder if my luck is changed by this time," he said: "I should think it is, for, in four trials, I have drawn three long threads out of the table-cloth, and only one short one."

Now, let not the reader be surprised at either of the two extraordinary points which this speech presents for consideration. It is certainly very wonderful, that men of sense and education should argue upon such grounds as the drawing threads out of a table-cloth, and draw auguries from such irrelevant things, where their fortunes and greatest worldly interests are concerned; but, it is, nevertheless, true, that they do so daily, whenever they are under the influence of the temporary insanity, called gaming. In the next place, let not the reader be surprised that the Count de Melun said that he had done a thing which he had not done; although, as we have related his whole proceedings, it must be very evident that he had drawn no threads out of the table-cloth at all. It was a falsehood, it is true, which an honest man would not have spoken; but the count was not one of those scrupulously honest men who hesitate to tell what is called a white lie even when it suits their purpose; and, on this occasion, he certainly had an object.

"Well, Melun," said Monsieur de St. Paul, taking the hint, "try your luck now; I have had throws enough for the present."

The count assented, and passing round to that side of the table, whispered a word to St. Paul, and took his seat and the box of dice.

As upon a former change of opponents, the baron again lost for a minute or two, but his success returned as speedily as before; and he was in the highest career of fortune, and shaking the dice-box gaily above his head, when the Count de Melun suddenly started up, overthrew the table, with all its riches upon the ground, and caught the hand and arm of the baron lightly in his own grasp, before he could bring the box down again.

"Now, Cajare," he exclaimed, at the same moment, "you shall cut my throat if you have not dice up your sleeve."

He was a stronger man than the baron, but Monsieur Cajare struggled free from his grasp. As he did so, however, the very effort produced the proof against him. Two dice dropped from the box in his hand, and two more from his sleeve; and furious, rather than confounded, he instantly drew his sword upon his adversary. The Count de Melun was not slow to meet him in the same manner; but before two or three passes had been exchanged, the weapons of both were beaten up, and two strong hands were laid upon the collar of the Baron de Cajare.

"Is this like gentlemen?" cried the baron, fiercely, turning round to see who it was that interfered; but the moment he did so, his eyes fell upon two archers of the Chatelet, with an exempt, and another archer standing close beside them.

"Pray, for what am I arrested?" he exclaimed, endeavouring to keep up the show of daring effrontery which he had assumed. "What is the charge against me?"

"The being a common cheat and a swindler," said the exempt, coming forward; "the playing with Italian dice, and plundering at the gaming-table."

"Of which here is proof sufficient," exclaimed Monsieur de St. Paul, who had caught up the dice from the floor; "and doubtless this has been going on very long."

"No, sir," replied the exempt, "not very long: there are many other charges against the baron, but this particular practice of his has only lately begun. Take him away!" and Monsieur de Cajare was accordingly removed from the room.

As soon as he was in the vestibule below, he turned with a bitter expression upon his lip to the exempt, and said, "I suppose I am to be taken before Monsieur Morin. This is, of course, his handiwork?"

"Oh! no, my dear," replied the exempt, who was somewhat of a wag; "we have a nice little lodging for you in the Chatelet already prepared; and, as I believe you have some business at the police-office to-morrow, it will be quite convenient."

The baron bent down his head with that conviction coming upon him, which seizes upon most bad men towards the end of their career, that honesty, after all, is the best policy; and that in the very cunningest schemes of knavery there is still some mortal ingredient which ultimately proves fatal to their success. A figure stood ready at the door, and in it he was now placed, with the exempt and two archers, while the third jumped upon the coach-box with the driver, and the vehicle rolled rapidly to the gates of the Chatelet.

The baron found everything ready for his reception; a tolerable room was allotted to him; better, indeed, than most of those that the building contained, but still it was a horrible and sickening abode. The sallow walls seemed themselves a picture and a memento of the sickly looks of those who, sprawling their names upon them, had recorded for future tenants the period of their own sojourn in that place of guilt and misery. The air of the room smelt faint and confined; and the window, far up near the ceiling, showed the massy bars incrustated with rust; but still too strong for human efforts. A table and a chair, and a bed of loathsome aspect, was the only furniture afforded to the proud and the luxurious, to him who had grown hard-hearted in prosperity, and who had built up vice and wickedness upon pampered success and untamed indulgence. The baron gazed upon it, and felt as if his heart would have burst at that moment: but his was a heart that might be smitten without being humbled, punished without being chastened; and the first effort was to shake off the oppression of circumstances, and to struggle rather than repent.

He walked quickly up and down the room as soon as he was left alone, seeking courage and powers of endurance from any source, and finding it only in the fiend Pride, who counselled him still to resist, even when resistance was vain. But thought was torture to him, and reflection added horror to horror; for he had to remember that he was now not alone frustrated, but was detected and disgraced; that his guilt was clearly proved against him; that he could no longer pretend to honour and to innocence; that reputation and character, as well as wealth and station, were gone; that he must lose his rank as a soldier, as well as the character of a gentleman; that he had no resource but the society and the habits of low sharpers and impostors.

Suddenly the names upon the walls struck his eyes, and lifting the pitiful lamp, which afforded the only light allowed to him, he

read three or four which seemed to be the freshest. They were those of persons whose trials he well remembered: the first had been broken on the wheel; the two next had been hanged some three months before; the fourth had been sent to the galleys; and in a spirit of miserable mirth, which the baron had not yet learnt to feel, had written under his name, in anticipation of his coming fate, "*Vogue la galère.*"

CHAPTER XLVIII

As the hour of eleven struck from the clock of Notre Dame, the carriage of the Count de Castelneau, drawn by six horses, and accompanied by two or three servants, drew up at the principal door of the bureau of police. Everything about the equipage was plain, but everything was rich; and the aspect of the count himself, though still dressed in the black habiliments which he had never laid aside, was that of a nobleman of high rank and wealth. Nobody could doubt or mistake it; and as he alighted from the vehicle, and walked with his usual calm, slow, firm step into the building, the officers of the police themselves, though none knew better the emptiness of fortune than they did, or were more accustomed to see high birth in humiliating situations, were impressed with the air and aspect of the man, and led him forward with reverence to the private room of the lieutenant-general. That officer had seen the count's arrival from his window; and having a great opinion of wealth and station, shared fully in the feelings of his inferiors, and received the count at the door of the room with all tokens of deference and respect. He watched the countenance of Monsieur de Castelneau, it is true, with that habit of scrutiny which had been engendered by years of dealing with the cunning and the wicked; but he perceived no trace of agitation: all was calm; though grave, not downcast; though serious, not sad.

The count was followed into the room by Ernest de Nogent, who certainly was the more agitated of the two. Him, also, the lieutenant-general welcomed, with much courtesy and affability; and he begged both to be seated, while he himself took his place near them, leaving room at the table in the middle of the chamber, at which there was but one chair, for a secretary to write, should his assistance be required. There was no fourth person present, however; and the Count de Castelneau began the conversation at once, as soon as the first ceremonies were over.

"I have ventured to intrude on you, sir," he said, "although I had heard that your health, unhappily for the country, has suffered from the duties of your arduous office, to inform you that a person named the Baron de Cajarc yesterday used threats towards me which no French gentleman can endure, and which I am sure the police of the realm will not tolerate, unless it should be found that the crimes with which he hinted he would charge me are satisfactorily proved. In order, sir, to afford you the opportunity of at once deciding whether his accusations are just or not, I came to give you my own plain, straightforward account of those events on

which, it seems, he intends to found his accusations, and that you may compare my statement with such other information as you possess upon the subject, and thence draw your own conclusions."

"Very proper and honourable conduct, indeed, sir," replied the lieutenant-general. "May I ask you what was the particular crime with which the baron threatened to charge you?"

Ernest thought that he perceived some slight inclination, either from habit or otherwise, to entangle the count, and he looked anxiously for the coming of Pierre Morin. No one appeared, however, and Monsieur de Castelneau replied, with perfect calmness, "The threat, sir, was vague; as I suppose is always the case where persons wish to excite greater apprehensions than the nature of the danger justifies; but from what he said, I was led to infer that he would accuse me of having had some share in the murder of an unhappy man, named Piteau, who was assassinated nineteen or twenty years ago."

"How long?" said the lieutenant-general. "I was not in office at the time. How long ago?"

The count paused. "I can tell you almost to a day," he said, after a moment's thought; "for I did not quit Paris till after the execution of the murderers. The assassination, now I think of it, must have been committed towards the latter end of April, in the year——"

"Good, good," replied the lieutenant-general, who had only asked the question in order to see whether the count would show any unwillingness to answer. "It was the end of April. I now recollect it. It was the end of April, nearly nineteen years ago, come Lady-day. But pray what was the alternative, Monsieur de Castelneau? When men use threats of this kind they always give those they menace some choice."

"It was simply, sir," replied the count, "that I should give him the hand of my adopted child; I having told him previously that she could never be his."

"The young lady has wealth, I presume?" said the lieutenant-general.

"Considerable wealth, at present," replied the count, "and it is well known that I intend to bestow upon her all that the law will allow me to alienate; which, having no relations nor heirs, is very nearly all that I possess."

"Very ample motive, indeed," said the lieutenant-general. "This brings the accuser, if his charge prove false and malicious, immediately under the arm of the criminal law. I will tell you, Monsieur de Castelneau, fairly, that the accusation was made by this very Monsieur de Cajac last night. He has been beforehand with you, but may perhaps have overshot his mark, as many other very clever people do. However, I must now hear what you have to say regarding the period of the murder itself, and your own circumstances at the time. Speak freely, Monsieur de Castelneau; speak frankly; and it shall not turn against you."

"So much is it my intention to speak freely, sir," replied the count, "that I am ready to relate openly every circumstance affecting myself at that time: but I think that it would be better for

some person to be here to take down what I say, that it may remain on record either for me or against me, as the case may be."

"As you please," replied the lieutenant-general, "as you please;" and ringing a table bell, he nodded his head to a person who entered, saying merely, "Monsieur La Caux."

The attendant retired, and a moment after, a secretary appeared, seated himself at the table without speaking, and prepared to write. The count then began, and repeated the same statement he had made to Annette and Ernest de Nogent on the preceding day; without any other variation than the curtailment of several details regarding his own motives and feelings, which to them he had dwelt upon at length. The lieutenant-general listened attentively to all that was said, and suffered the count to proceed to the end uninterrupted. He then asked suddenly, "Pray, Monsieur de Castelneau, how soon did you leave Paris after the day of the murder?"

"I remained, sir," replied the count, "till the trial had taken place, and the murderers were executed."

"Pray did you live openly as before," said the lieutenant-general, "or did you conceal yourself?"

"I lived as I had previously done for nearly a month," replied the count. "The fact is, that finding myself, as I have said, somewhat embarrassed for money, and many sudden calls coming in upon me, I sent the child that I had adopted out of Paris almost as soon as she had been consigned to my care, giving the nurse who was with her the greater part of the money that I had. I then retired to the precincts of the Temple, to shelter myself from personal inconvenience. There I continued to live without any farther concealment than before."

"This is all, then, that you have to depose?" said the lieutenant-general.

The count assented: and the chief officer of police ordered the declaration to be read over to him, and tendered it for his signature. The count found it accurate, and immediately signed it; and the lieutenant-general, then rising, said, "With your leave, Monsieur de Castelneau, we will now remove to another room, where we shall find your party,* and several other persons who are concerned in this business, either as witnesses or otherwise. Be so kind as to follow me."

He then led the way through a door on his own right; and a long and narrow passage, closed by another door, which on being opened gave admission into a much larger chamber or hall, where were collected a considerable number of people, comprising five or six clerks, and as many archers and exempts. A large table was at the end near the door, by which the lieutenant-general and those who accompanied him came in; and at one side of it was seated Pierre Morin. He was writing busily, and apparently attending to nothing that was passing in the room, except a few words which were addressed to him from time to time by a gentleman in the robe of an advocate, who sat near, and who proved to

* By this name the lieutenant-general intended to designate the accuser of the count; such being the legal expression.

be one of the commissaries of the Chatelet. At the farther side of the hall, which in length might be about forty feet, appeared the Baron de Cajare, with an archer on each side, and a number of other persons near. On his countenance appeared a stern look of angry defiance; and he gazed upon each person that entered the room with a flashing eye and frowning brow, as if he would willingly have risen from his chair to insult or assail them.

The opening of the door and the entering of the lieutenant-general of police, caused Pierre Morin to lift his head; and he then rose and bowed low, to which salutation his superior officer returned a familiar inclination, saying, "Good morning, Monsieur Morin. Good morning, Monsieur Rochebrune. Gaultier, place chairs for Monsieur de Castelneau and Monsieur de Nogent. Give me the declaration, La Caux. Be seated, Monsieur Morin; pray be seated, Monsieur Rochebrune. Now, tell me, Morin, what is before us this morning?"

"Chiefly the case of the Count de Castelneau," replied Pierre Morin; "if you think fit to give it a preliminary examination here, in order to see whether there be grounds for sending it before other judges."

"*Cognez!*" cried the Baron de Cajare; but the lieutenant-general turned his eyes sternly upon him, and then replied—

"We will investigate it here, of course, first, Monsieur Morin, as it appears to me a mere matter of police in the present instance; Monsieur de Castelneau being an accuser as well as an accused, and charging the Baron de Cajare with using threats and menaces for illegal purposes. But it seems to me that you have put the gentleman under some restraint. What is the cause of that?"

"Why, sir," replied Pierre Morin, "though in obedience to your order, which no one here is entitled to disobey, I have ordered Monsieur de Cajare to be brought hither, he is at present, I am sorry to say, a prisoner in the Chatelet. The police have long been looking after him, as a notorious *pipeur*, who has taken in one half of the court. We have long known some of his habits; and more especially that he is in the possession of a number of those Italian dice, which, though solid, and of a single piece, are lighter on one side than on the other. He was detected in the trick last night, at the house of Monsieur de Melun, where he won, by one trick or another, nearly two hundred thousand livres in a few hours. The dice were found up his sleeve, and the matter was quite clear."

"It is a lie!" said the voice of the Baron de Cajare; "the whole is false throughout."

"Silence!" exclaimed the lieutenant-general, sternly; "bring forward the Baron de Cajare. Stand there, sir; and having first been sworn to speak the truth, make your declaration and charge against Monsieur de Castelneau, or any other person or persons, clearly, distinctly, and without prevarication."

"I shall do so, certainly," replied the Baron de Cajare, "although I see that the cause is predetermined, and that it is resolved not to do justice, whatever may be proved or disproved."

The face of the lieutenant-general assumed no very placable expression; but the Count de Castelneau, who perhaps felt that

there really was some degree of prejudice existing against the baron, interfered, saying, "I beseech you, sir, do not suffer this gentleman's rash conduct to make you treat his testimony lightly. Should you do so, my exculpation will not be half so clear as if you give him patient and full attention."

"He shall be heard in his statement, Monsieur de Castelnau," replied the lieutenant-general, "and shall be punished for his insolence. However, it is our custom here to take into account the character of the accuser, as well as the character of the accused; and, of course, when a swindler brings a charge against a man of reputation, we give it no great heed, unless other circumstances add weight to it. It is a natural conclusion that a rogue does not make a denunciation from a pure and simple love of justice, and we generally seek for some secret motive, such as revenge or cupidity; on the discovery of which, we deal in a very summary manner both with the charge and the accuser. Now, sir, make your declaration, and take care of what you say."

"My allegation is," replied the baron, "that in the month of April, in the year 17—, the person now called Count de Castelnau, but then known as the Abbe de Castelnau, did conspire to murder the jeweller and goldsmith, Gaultier Fiteau, and kept watch at the door while the actual deed was perpetrated by the Count de H— and the Chevalier M—, who were executed for the offence; and I moreover declare that Pierre Morin, the person who bore witness against the two murderers, was well aware that the Abbe de Castelnau was so watching at the door, but that he has always concealed the fact; thus frustrating the ends of justice, from favour and affection towards the Count de Castelnau, because the said count had taken and adopted as his child the daughter of the said Pierre Morin; and this I will undertake to prove as soon as the count is put upon his trial."

"Will you swear to the truth of this declaration?" demanded the lieutenant-general, "and that it is made without deceit or fraud, and upon no motives of favour, enmity, or interest whatsoever? Give him the oath."

The oath was accordingly administered, and taken without scruple by the Baron de Cajare. The lieutenant-general then looked towards Pierre Morin, and said, "You hear, Monsieur Morin, that you are yourself a party accused in this affair."

"For which reason, sir," replied Pierre Morin, rising from his seat, "and because my testimony will be absolutely necessary in any proceedings regarding Monsieur de Castelnau, I will beseech you, in the first place, to examine into that part of the charge which affects me, that the credibility of the different witnesses in the business may be ascertained."

"I demand," exclaimed the Baron de Cajare, interrupting the reply of the lieutenant-general, "that the case may be remitted to the proper judges."

"As soon as we are satisfied," said the lieutenant-general, fixing his eyes sternly upon him; "as soon as we are satisfied that there is a case at all. You are to understand, sir, that it is not allowed in France, that every villain who chooses should put an honest man to the expense, shame, and pain of a public trial. Be silent, sir, and

do not interrupt the proceedings of the court. We shall follow the course that you have proposed, Monsieur Morin; that is to say, we shall inquire into the credibility of all the witnesses who are likely to bear testimony in this affair, beginning with yourself; and, in the next place, we shall hear their evidence and declarations. We shall then consider the character and the credibility of the accuser, and ultimately, having heard any explanations or defence which Monsieur de Castelneau may think fit to make, shall send the cause to be tried before the proper judges, or dismiss the charge altogether as circumstances may require. What witness have you, Monsieur le Baron de Cajare, that Monsieur Morin, here present, did commit the offence of which you say he is guilty?"

"I will produce my witness at the trial of the Count de Castelneau," replied the Baron de Cajare.

"I might demand that he should be brought forward at once," said Pierre Morin; "but my exculpation is so easy, sir, that I will not take up your time by enforcing the common course of proceeding, and will at once justify myself. The act and the motive attributed to me by the Baron de Cajare are equally false. In the first place, the young lady known under the name of Mademoiselle de St. Morin is not my child, but the daughter of two persons of high rank and consideration——"

"The legitimate daughter!" exclaimed the Count de Castelneau, starting up.

"Silence!" exclaimed the lieutenant-general. "Monsieur de Castelneau, do not interrupt the witness."

"The legitimate daughter," said Pierre Morin, "of two persons of high rank and consideration; and next, in regard to the act of concealing anything I knew, I beg leave to call for the volume of reports and declarations for that year and month in which the murder of Fiteau was committed, and to request that my last declaration concerning this affair may be publicly read. Let the register be brought."

"It is here," said one of the secretaries; and on a sign from the lieutenant-general, he proceeded to read.

"Pierre Morin, &c. &c., deposed, this—— day of the month of April, 17——, that when he came out of the house of Gaultier Fiteau, shortly after the murder had been committed, he perceived a man standing, dressed, he thinks, in an ecclesiastical habit, and wearing a long, dark-coloured coat, whom he believes to be the Abbe de Castelneau. That the said man came up to him apparently in haste and fear, and seemed to mistake him for some one else, asking him in a tone of great terror, 'What was that cry? Was the old man there? You have not killed him?' That the said Pierre Morin feels quite sure from the manner in which this person spoke he did not know, and was not consenting to the murder beforehand; and that, when the said ecclesiastic found that he was mistaken in the person to whom he spoke, he fled as fast as possible; and that the witness being convinced by his words, he was not a participator in the crime, did not pursue him."

"Is there any note upon the declaration in the hand of my late predecessor, Monsieur Bertin?" said the lieutenant-general; "if so, read it."

"There is a note, my lord," replied the secretary, "to this effect: 'No proof of guilt, but the contrary, against Monsieur de Castelneau; nevertheless, secret surveillance ordered. N.B. With caution.'"

"I beg leave, sir," said Pierre Morin, "to rest upon this testimony, which cannot lie, as to my having done my duty in the affair, and to claim to be received as a witness, without imputation, in the case of Monsieur de Castelneau."

"Beyond all doubt," replied the lieutenant-general. "you are held perfectly clear of the charge against you. Now, Monsieur de Cajare, what is your evidence against Monsieur de Castelneau?"

"I will not bring it forward at present," replied the baron. "Upon the trial I will produce it. If you choose to dismiss the cause, you must."

"We will not dismiss the cause yet," said the lieutenant-general, with a very sinister sort of smile; "such accusations as these are of a very serious nature, Monsieur de Cajare, and the law says, 'in criminal matters, the proof should be reciprocal,'* and what is brought against you must be investigated, as well as what you bring against others. As you will not call your witnesses, we must see to your own character, in order to ascertain what credit is to be given to you, and whether you have been moved by motives of justice and propriety or not."

The baron remained sullenly silent, and the lieutenant-general, turning to Pierre Morin, said, "We will now go into the charge against the baron, to see how far his unsupported word should lead us to give attention to his accusation. You say that he was arrested last night as a common swindler, in the house of the Count de Melun. Have you any depositions upon that affair?"

"One from the count, one from Monsieur de St. Paul, and one from Monsieur Michaud, gentlemen all present," replied Pierre Morin; "the substance of which is as follows: the count declares, that, warned by the police, he watched the proceedings of Monsieur de Cajare for a quarter of an hour, while he was playing at hazard with Monsieur St. Paul, and that several times he saw him clearly, when he was about to throw, take up the dice provided by the house, and while pretending to put them into the box, contrive to slip them up the sleeve of his coat, substituting others in their place; that he, the count, remarked, moreover, that generally in passing the dice over to Monsieur St. Paul, the prisoner contrived to change them again, but could not always do so. The count further declares, that having taken Monsieur St. Paul's place at the table, and seeing the baron practise the same trick, he started up and caught his hand, while two of the dice were in the box and two up his sleeve; the baron then struggled to free himself, and the four dice now lying before you sir, dropped to the ground. Messrs. St. Paul and Michaud confirm these facts, and, moreover, say, that Monsieur de Cajare was never previously suspected, though his success was extraordinary, and though people wondered why he had lately given up playing at piquet, and addicted himself entirely to hazard."

The lieutenant-general had held a copy of the depositions in his

* See the case of the Duc d'Aiguillon and Monsieur de la Chalotais.

hand, while Pierre Morin briefly recapitulated the substance; and, as soon as the commissary had done, he asked, "What say you to this, Monsieur de Cajare?"

"That it is a conspiracy," replied the Baron de Cajare, "planned by three knaves to escape paying the money they had fairly lost, and probably devised, as well as taken advantage of, by another knave here present, for the purpose of screening Monsieur de Castelnau by retorting the charge upon me. There were no dice up my sleeve; there were none but those in the box which I found in the house. When the Count de Melun overset the table and scattered the money I had won upon the floor, St. Paul threw down two other dice—I saw him—and then pretended to pick up four. Most likely those he did throw down were loaded; for certainly the persons present would omit nothing that might condemn me."

"These dice seem to me to be sound enough," said the lieutenant-general, taking them up, and shaking them in the box with a sort of taste for the amusement which few Frenchmen of that day were without.

"Throw these two, sir," said Pierre Morin, pointing to the others, "and I will call them before they come out."

The lieutenant-general did so, with a smile. "Size quatre," cried Pierre Morin, and size quatre appeared upon the table.

The lieutenant-general threw more than once, and still the result was the same; nor can it be told how long he might have gone on in the frivolous sort of torture which he inflicted upon the baron, had not Pierre Morin interfered, saying, "To put the matter beyond all doubt, however, sir, I ordered a domiciliary visit to be made this morning to the apartments of Monsieur de Cajare, and beg to present you, sir, with four and twenty pair of fine Italian dice, with the aid of which you may throw any combinations you may think fit. These were taken from the private cabinet of the baron himself."

"Now, Monsieur de Cajare," said the lieutenant-general, "having ascertained the credibility of your own testimony, will you produce your witnesses; or will you withdraw your charge?"

"I will never withdraw my charge," replied the baron, fiercely, and he fixed his eyes, full of hatred, upon the Count de Castelnau.

"No, no, he shall go down to the grave with the doubt upon his head. Men shall point at him, and shall say, 'That is the man who helped to murder Fiteau.' I know what suspicion can do: it can poison the food and turn the cup to gall. It can sow the pillow with thorns, and make the heart ache for ever; and such shall be his fate. I accuse him still of the deed. You have proof before you that he was watching at the door when the murder was committed: and now I tell you that the shop-boy of the murdered man saw him go to that very spot, in company with the two assassins who actually committed the murder. He himself has sworn to me that he beheld it. After this, let all the vain excuses of my bringing an unfounded charge, either from revenge, or any other motive, be done away. The accusation I urge is reasonable and just, and no one has a right to attach to my conduct wrong motives

in the unjust manner in which they have been imputed to me this day. I call upon that honest magistrate, Monsieur de Rochebrune, to defend me and to do me justice."

"I must say," said the Commissary Rochebrune, who had not yet spoken, "if Monsieur de Cajare can prove that such information has been communicated to him, it will greatly alter the question."

The lieutenant-general quietly pushed across to him a copy of the declaration which had been made that day by Monsieur de Castelneau; but Rochebrune, after having read it through, replied, "And the charge against Monsieur de Castelneau must be considered at an end. It cannot be sustained for a moment; but still, as far as affects Monsieur de Cajare, if he can prove that such an accusation has really been made to him, it not only must take away the suspicion of calumnious intent and interested motives, but must show that he only did his duty in making the charge; that he was moved by zeal for the public welfare, and that the State is, in fact, indebted to him for his conduct, and should suffer his behaviour on this occasion, to be taken as *à balance*, in some degree, for any little fault he may have committed in regard to the dice."

The lieutenant-general looked at Pierre Morin, and the latter smiled, well knowing, that although Monsieur de Rochebrune, thus called upon to defend the baron, felt himself bound to do so, and did it with great skill, he was thoroughly convinced of the culpability of the person whose cause he advocated, and might, also, only plunge him into greater difficulties, if suffered to proceed in ignorance. Pierre Morin replied, therefore, "What my learned friend says, sir, is worthy of all attention; but can Monsieur de Cajare show that he has received such information. Where is this shop-boy that he talks of? and what is his name? He may be merely an imaginary personage for aught we know."

"His name, sir, is Pierre Jean," replied the baron, "but where he is to be found I cannot tell. I thought he might have been met with in my own apartments in my father's house, but from what has been said of the visit of the police, I take it for granted, that he is no longer there."

"It is, of course, an absolute conclusion," said Pierre Morin, coolly, "that he should not be there now, unless he have escaped the eyes of the police; for if he saw them coming, there can be no doubt that he would run away; and if they found him there, no doubt can exist they would bring him with them; but to relieve the mind of Monsieur de Cajare, I will tell him that we have got Master Pierre Jean quite safe. There is no fear of our being at a loss for his evidence, such as it is; he was arrested last night coming out of a house in the Rue Tirechapes, and some very curious little documents found upon him, one of which is in the handwriting of Monsieur le Baron de Cajare, to all appearance, and is signed with his name. This is it, I think;" and he took a paper from the table. "But first let us have evidence of this having been found upon him. Come forward, Monsieur Nicholas, the exempt: did you search the person named Pierre Jean, last night, and mark the articles found upon him?"

"I did, sir," replied the exempt.

"Was this one of the things taken from him, and is that your mark?" demanded the commissary.

The exempt again replied in the affirmative, and Pierre Morin went on, with his eyes upon the paper, saying, "By this curious agreement, monsieur, you will perceive that the Baron de Cajare agrees to pay to Pierre Jean the sum of five thousand louis, either if the Count de Castelnau be condemned for the murder of Gaultier-Fiteau, or if he, the Baron de Cajare, marries Mademoiselle Annette de St. Morin. Moreover, the baron is to give the sum of ten thousand crowns to this worthy and respectable person, in case it should be necessary to send this said Pierre Jean out of the country. The reasons are not stated, but you may divine them; and, ~~just~~ Monsieur Pierre Jean, who is somewhat in the habit of making mistakes, such as taking other people's property for his own, forgetting his own name and writing that of another man, and similar little errors, should commit any blunder in this delicate affair—it is agreed that he shall put himself entirely under the care and direction of the Baron de Cajare, till either the Count de Castelnau is condemned and executed for the crime with which the two friends proposed to charge him, or till the baron be married to Mademoiselle de St. Morin. Now, sir, when it is shown that Monsieur de Cajare used these threats towards the count yesterday; that the count refused him the hand of Mademoiselle de St. Morin, in spite of these menaces; that Monsieur de Cajare immediately made his declaration against the count; that, at the same time, to get rid of my evidence, he made a false accusation against me; that he is himself a sharper; that the man with whom he deals, and on whose testimony he rests, is stained with every crime, and has been punished for several infamous offences; when it is, moreover, proved, by his own hand-writing to this unlawful and most criminal document, that he hires and bribes a notorious villain to bring a charge amounting to death against a respectable nobleman, who, for twenty years, has devoted himself to works of benevolence and charity;—I say, sir, when all this is established, it is only fit and proper, that the culprit before you should be sent immediately to take his trial and abide the punishment awarded by the law to such dark and infamous offences; unless, indeed, by great humility and contrition he moves your compassion, or from some other cause best known to your own wisdom, you think right to exercise the power intrusted to you by the law, and judging the case in a summary manner, send him either to the galleys or the penal colonies in America. But, perhaps," he added, "in the first instance, you would like to see this bosom-friend of Monsieur de Cajare, this pleasant companion of a gentleman in the first circles of Paris, colonel in a royal regiment, and —"

The Baron de Cajare could bear no more; but, darting from between the two archers, who had kept by his side when he advanced towards the table, he rushed towards Pierre Morin like a wild beast in its spring. Luckily he was unarmed; and before Ernest de Nogent, starting forward with his hand upon his sword to defend the commissary, could reach the spot, the baron had passed the end of the table, and was within grasp of Pierre Morin.

Several other persons hurried on at once to the same point, but no one was in time to interfere; and Pierre Morin sat calmly with a smile, which only enraged his adversary the more. When the baron was within a foot of him, however, he suddenly rose from his seat; and, notwithstanding the difference of age, with agility and presence of mind, which went far beyond the energy and vehemence of his opponent's hatred, he eluded his first fierce attack by stepping a little on one side, then caught him by the collar, as he was recovering himself, and threw him thundering back upon the pavement. The next moment he resumed his seat as tranquilly as if nothing had happened, and, turning to the lieutenant-general, he said, with a laugh, "I think we have not seen anything of this kind, sir, since Davot's business; but he was a strong man, and this is a baby. Bring in Pierre Jean; the man's head is cut; let him bleed, let him bleed, it will do him good."

Confounded, nearly stunned, with his whole senses bewildered, frustrated, humiliated, and despairing, the Baron de Cajarc sat in the chair which they placed for him, without proffering another word; while Pierre Jean was brought to the end of the table, and interrogated regarding the events of the last few days.

The face of that personage was now remarkably pale, leaving a certain degree of redness, which had settled in his nose, to shine out through the dim mass of white around, like a beacon in a stormy sea. All his impudence, in truth, was gone; for although he attempted once or twice to smile with his old air of careless freedom, yet that smile deviated into a painful grin whenever he tried it; and, to say truth, he seldom, if ever, ventured even to look around; for he had been now taught fully, not only to taste the sorrows and discomforts of imprisonment, for those he had known sufficiently long before, but to feel to his very heart, which he had not hitherto felt, that he had committed great crimes, and was within the grasp of the most unsparing of all powers.

Had the Baron de Cajarc looked in the villain's face for a moment it would have been enough to take from him any little remnant of hope which he might have preserved; but the few first interrogatories that were spoken, and the answers that were given to them by Pierre Jean, showed him, as soon as he had in some degree recovered his senses, that his base confederate, as might well have been expected, was quite willing to betray him, now that it was clear he was unsuccessful.

Pierre Jean, in fact, was ready to say anything that he was asked to say, for at that moment there was the spectre of a rope and a gibbet before his eyes, from which he would have done anything on earth to escape. The baron had now no resource but silence; for he could reply to nothing that was said, and he felt that he had already uttered too much. The sensations in his bosom were at that moment a punishment well nigh sufficient for the crimes that he had committed; but, of course, the retributive operation of the law could not rest there.

It is not necessary to dwell longer on a scene so painful and so humiliating to the character of man; for, in truth, there is nothing degrading to our nature but wickedness in all its forms and aspects. When the execution of Pierre Jean was over, the lieutenant-

general ordered him to be removed, and then, after consulting with Pierre Morin and Monsieur Rochebrune, he addressed the Count de Castelneau, saying, "Monsieur de Castelneau, the charge against you is not only dismissed, but you quit this place completely freed from all suspicion. The Baron de Cajare, on the contrary, having been charged by you with using threats and calumniating you falsely, for designs and purposes of his own, has not only been proved to my satisfaction guilty of that charge, but appears criminal of a most detestable conspiracy with the person named Pierre Jean, for the purpose of procuring your condemnation to death, in the event of your persisting in the rejection of his suit to Mademoiselle de St. Morin. That he is guilty of barefaced swindling also, is beyond a doubt; and if you choose to demand it, I will immediately have him for trial to the proper judges. It is my own opinion that, under such circumstances, his life itself would be affected; but it seems to me that, for the honour and credit of the French nobility generally, we should deal with this case more quietly, and subject him to a less severe infliction, such as the law allows me to impose, without recourse to an ordinary trial. What say you, Monsieur de Castelneau, do you demand his trial or not?"

"By no means," replied the Count de Castelneau. "I have no revengeful feelings against him; deal with him as you think fit; but I hope he may be warned by what has just occurred, never to seek his objects by such means as he has now employed."

"He will never have the opportunity," replied the lieutenant-general: "for it is my intention immediately to ship him off for the colonies, and he too well knows the punishment of evasion to attempt to return to France."

"It matters, it matters not," cried the Baron de Cajare, as he heard his sentence; "my time will yet come."

"For the gibbet or the wheel?" said Pierre Morin; but the baron did not hear, or did not mark his words, and went on in a low tone, as if speaking to himself. "Ay, a new country, and a new name, and new objects, and new fortunes."

"And a new life, and a better spirit, and regained happiness, and a tranquil end," said Pierre Morin. "Follow such a course, sir; follow such a course, and there may be yet peace for you on earth, and rest in heaven!"

"Not if you be in the one, or in the other," said the Baron de Cajare, shaking his clenched hand at him. "Hell would be heaven to me if I could see you there."

"I trust you may enjoy it alone, sir," replied Pierre Morin, calmly: "you had better take him away, Nicolas: his case is over, I imagine, and he grows abusive."

"The first three years are to be passed in hard labour, at the port," said the lieutenant-general, as the baron was hurried away by the exempt and the archers. The criminal turned round, and glared upon him, but the potent magistrate who spoke, only returned his glance with a look of contempt, and offered his hand to Monsieur de Castelneau, with various expressions of courteous congratulations on the result of that day's proceedings. The count replied gravely, but politely, and took his leave. Ere he left the hall, he paused to speak with Pierre Morin, his counte-

nance relaxing into a warmer and brighter smile than usual as he did so.

"It is many years, Monsieur Morin," he said, "since we have met, and I find that you have done justice to me in my absence, as well as to yourself. Accept my best thanks for both; for in your changed fortunes I have found my security, as well as in your true and honourable dealings with my name and character. You are one, I know, who will forgive my reference to your former situation; for an honourable man, who raises himself by wise, good, and generous actions, renders a greater benefit to society than to himself."

"I am prouder, sir," replied the commissary, "of what I have been, than of what I am. To have been a poor, half-famished filigree-worker, and to have preserved my integrity in some circumstances of difficulty, I thank God, is all my own; but to be here now, chief commissary of police, I owe to the bounty and kindness of others," and he turned with a bow to the lieutenant-general.

"To your own good conduct, Monsieur Morin," replied that officer.

"And to your discernment, sir," said the count; "but, Monsieur Morin, there is a subject on which I would fain speak with you. May I ask you to visit me at Versailles?"

"I fear, sir, that can hardly be," replied Pierre Morin. "But you are about to return to Castelnau. I have business there ere long, and I will wait upon you, as soon as the health of monseigneur the lieutenant-general replaces me in my proper state of insignificance. I trust that it may be soon. When I come, all that you wish to inquire into shall be fully explained."

"I have been patient for nearly twenty years," said the count; "will you be patient for as many weeks, Ernest?"

"I seek no explanations, my dear sir," replied Ernest; "none could add to my happiness at this moment!"

CHAPTER XLIX.

SOME months had passed since the events related in the preceding chapter. Various changes had taken place in the great world. In France, a king had died, and another had succeeded, and a softer and more virtuous rule reigned in the court; when, in the evening of a sweet spring day, a carriage with six dusty horses stopped at the small, but pretty inn, of a village in the Limousin. A *chaise de poste* followed, and the landlord of the *auberge*, who seldom saw so much good company arrive at his humble abode, began to calculate how he should accommodate the whole; though, with the easy confidence of a Frenchman, he doubted not that the matter might well be managed. As soon as the carriage paused, the doors of both were opened, and a young gentleman, advancing with a quick step from the *chaise de poste*, approached the side of the other vehicle, and assisted the Count de Castelneau to alight.

A great change had come upon Monsieur de Castelneau; the few months that had passed seemed to have added many years to his age. His hair was now almost quite white, and he was much thinner than he had previously been. He appeared, indeed, to have been suffering from severe illness, and such was the case; for during several months, after those scenes which he had borne with so much firmness, he had hung upon the very verge of the grave. Anxious for the fate of Annette, he had more than once pressed her eagerly, in the moments when his own life was utterly despaired of, to give her hand at once to Ernest de Nogent; but Annette for once was disobedient, and Ernest did not doubt her affection, although she would not mingle joy with sorrow, and sorrow with joy, suffering her bridal wreath, perhaps, to be covered with the veil of mourning.

To the Count de Castelneau, throughout his illness, Ernest showed all the tenderness and affection of a son, and he now saw fairer days and sweeter hopes appear, and looked forward to the arrival of the whole party at Castelneau, as the moment that was at length to make him happy in the possession of her he loved. The count had borne the journey well, so far as they had hitherto gone, and proceeding with short stages from place to place in fine weather, and through beautiful scenes, though Ernest might be a little impatient for their arrival, yet the journey had been but as an excursion of pleasure; and bright dreams and dear imaginations had risen up in the hearts of the two lovers as they gazed upon many an object of interest, and many a lovely sight.

They were now within less than a day's journey from Castelnau, and a fairer spot could not have been chosen for the passing away of the few evening hours, while waiting for an event that would make them all happy. The clean little inn, seated under its high wooded bank; the clear stream flowing on before the doors; the bridge covered with its ivy, and shadowed by its group of spreading chestnuts in the fresh green of the spring; the tender blue of the sky, the soft white clouds that skimmed along low down in the air, as if seeking to sport with the branches of the trees, the sweet voice of the nightingale, just beginning to pour forth the rich song of his love, all spoke to the hearts of people wearied and sick of crowds and cities, and whispered hope and peace.

The count, though still not strong, looked gay and brighter than he had done for many a day; and Annette, as she followed him from the carriage, and gave her hand to Ernest to assist her in descending, gazed in her lover's face with one of those looks of love, and hope, and tender confidence, that made his heart thrill with a longing to press her to his bosom at that moment, and pour forth again and again all the depth of his affection towards her.

"Come," said the count, after pausing and glancing round for a moment, "it wants yet an hour or two of night; we will sup here, my good host. Put me a chair under this tree, and let me drink in the calm fresh air."

All was done as he proposed; but before supper could be spread upon the table, another carriage, coming at full speed along the road, dashed up, as if going on to a town some miles beyond. It was accompanied by several servants, and though the equipage was plain, yet in form and appearance it was as handsome as the taste of that day permitted it to be. It had passed the spot where the count was seated with Annette by his side, and with Ernest de Négent standing near, when suddenly a gentleman thrust his head forth from within, and called loudly to the postillions to stop. The horses were brought up in a moment, a lackey descending opened the door of the vehicle, and Pierre Morin alighting, approached the Count de Castelnau.

"I am on my way," he said, "to visit you, Monsieur de Castelnau; but I come not alone: there is a lady in that carriage who owes you much, and who is anxious to express her gratitude to you. Perhaps, mademoiselle," he continued, turning to Annette before the count could reply, "perhaps it might be better for you to speak with her for a moment first."

Annette had risen, and she now ran gladly forward to the side of the carriage, for the lady was herself in the act of alighting, and that graceful form and beautiful countenance were not to be mistaken for a moment. There were many people around; but the sensations which were in the bosom of that lady were too powerful to be restrained by any of the small considerations of ordinary life. Once more she cast her arms around Annette, once more she held her to her heart, once more her eyes gushed forth with tears, and deluged the fair neck on which she pressed her lips.

"My Annette," she murmured, "my dear, dear Annette; my child, my own sweet child!"

"I thought so!" replied Annette, in the same low tone, returning the embrace, and mingling her tears with her mother's. "I was sure it was: I felt it must be so!"

The count had arisen, with his eyes fixed upon the lady, and passing Pierre Morin without reply, he advanced eagerly towards her. "Good Heaven!" he said, as he came up, holding out his hand; "Mademoiselle d'Argencerre. Now, then, now! Who is this? Is she not—is she not your niece?"

The lady shook her head mournfully, and then again clasped Annette to her bosom, exclaiming—"No, ah! no. She is my child."

The count gazed in her face for a moment or two, with a thousand questions struggling to his lips; but then the kindly and gentlemanly feelings of his nature overcame all other sensations. He took the lady's hand, and led her towards a seat, saying, "I will not agitate you by seeking for further information now, for you are too much moved already. Sit down by me, dear lady. You were one of those who were always kind to me, and defended me, when others slighted or condemned me. I have ever loved you as a brother."

"And well may I love you as a sister," replied the lady, "for you have been a father to my child."

"It is strange," said the count, "most strange! but it matters not: let us all pause here for the night, and to-morrow go on to Castelnau together. Monsieur Morin, there is no one here who does not owe you much; for, by some strange fate, you have been mingled deeply with every event affecting us."

"I thank God, Monsieur de Castelnau," replied Pierre Morin, "that he has given me power to serve those I love, and show my gratitude to my benefactor. To this lady, to her sister, and to her father, I owed everything. He took me as a peasant boy, gave me education, and caused me to be instructed in a trade which I chose for myself, and which promised to put me in possession of ease, if not of wealth. They—when I sometimes misused his goodness and his bounty towards me—when, with the careless thoughtlessness of youth, I spent the money which I should have reserved against the hour of need—they interceded for me, and obtained for me fresh assistance: till at length kindness overcame thoughtlessness, and I formed such resolutions as must have led me to ease in any pursuit. You may judge, therefore, Monsieur de Castelnau, how I have watched and prayed for such benefactors —"

"And how you have rewarded them," said the lady. "Nay, sit beside us, Monsieur Morin: sit beside us. You are a nobleman: such as no king can make."

Annette's eyes, still ready from past agitation to overflow at each new emotion, though they were no longer actually tearful, had been fixed for several moments upon the countenance of him she loved, who stood near, not mingling at all in the conversation, but neither unheeding it, nor himself unnoticed; for more than once the lady had gazed upon him with a look of solemn interest, well knowing how entirely the happiness of her child depended upon him.

There was a pause at this moment, and Ernest instantly took

advantage of it, crossing before the little group, and saying, as he approached the lady, "I have a blessing to ask, and I ask it fearlessly, for I am sure you are already aware of all that has been in my mind," and he took Annette's hand in his own.

"She is yours, Ernest, she is yours," replied the lady. "Your kind and excellent father, my best and noblest friend, is the only one, except this good gentleman, Monsieur Morin, acquainted with the sad secret of this dear child's birth. Let me compose my thoughts a little; let me think of how I shall tell my tale in the shortest words, and you shall all know it."

"It shall be told at Castelnau," said the count, with a smile. "We will repose and refresh ourselves to-night. We will depart early in the morning: we will sup to-morrow, in the grey evening; by the little cross where Ernest and Annette first met." There, dear lady, you shall relate the history, as if it were some old legend; and though the past which it recalls may be painful, the present by which you are surrounded must be sweet."

It was arranged as the count had proposed, and we may pass over the intervening hours. The journey had been more rapid than was expected; everything had been prepared beforehand by a messenger from the count; supper was spread on the green bank where Annette had been seated when the wolf attacked her, and the servants had been sent away, that no ears but those concerned might listen. It occupied a considerable time, and was broken by many a question and many an exclamation; but the substance was this.

The families of Argencerre and Castelnau had been united by frequent alliances through many generations, and, somewhat more than twenty years before the time to which we have now conducted the reader, a marriage had been proposed between the elder sister of the lady who spoke, the heiress of Argencerre, and Henri, the son of the then Count de Castelnau. They had often met, and both the sisters were extremely beautiful; but the eldest had felt in her bosom, from a very early period, the seeds of a disease which ultimately brought her to the grave. The impression was strong upon her mind that she was destined to die young, and she never suffered one worldly thought to take possession of her mind. She shrunk from every tie of earth; and human love, in her own case, would have seemed to her a robbery of heaven. She grieved not, then, when she saw that the heart of the young lord of Castelnau turned towards her sister rather than herself, and she speedily resolved upon her conduct. The family of Argencerre paid their annual visit to Castelnau; and there explanations took place which changed the views of all except Mademoiselle d'Argencerre herself. She told her determination to retire for ever from the world, and to resign her rights and claims to her sister. The Count de Castelnau gladly consented that upon such conditions his son should marry the younger rather than the elder sister, thereby bringing the fortunes of both into the family of Castelnau. The Count d'Argencerre was not so well pleased, indeed, but he did not refuse his consent; and the contract of marriage having been drawn up, in order to bind himself firmly, he signed it with the Count de Castelnau, though he himself was obliged to return to

Paris before the union could be completed, to make the necessary arrangements regarding his estates. The young lord of Castelneau, too, was obliged to join his regiment in a month, and these circumstances it was agreed that the marriage of Louise and her lover should be delayed till after the campaign. The two ladies, however, remained at Castelneau, while their fathers proceeded to Paris. The contract was left in the hands of the young lord; nothing was wanting but his signature with that of Louise, and the benediction of the church to complete the marriage; and love triumphed over prudence. They signed the contract in secret: in secret the religious ceremony was performed, and Louise d'Argencerre came the wife of Henri de Castelneau a week or two before he took his departure for the army. To the grief and anxiety of his parting with his bride were added the unexpected pain and embarrassment of hearing that the Count d'Argencerre now sought to withdraw the consent he had given; that a proposal had been made for the hand of Louise by a lover allied to the blood royal of France; and that angry letters were passing between the two fathers on the subject. The young husband was obliged to go, however; and ere he had left her for many days, his bride was carried away from Castelneau by her father, between whom and the old count broke forth a violent feud. The contract which both had signed was sought for, but could not be found: no suspicion was entertained of the private marriage, and the Count d'Argencerre returned to the capital, determined to give his daughter's hand to another. He could not do so, however, till the contract of marriage was formally annulled; and being called to command a division of the army on the Rhine, he wrote in a peremptory tone to the young lord of Castelneau to send him back the contract, inclosing, at the same time, an authorization, and even injunction, from the old Count de Castelneau, so to do. He himself marched with his regiment to Saare Louis; but the first letter that he there received, announced to him the death of the young nobleman to whom his daughter's hand had been promised; and the heart of the Count d'Argencerre, which was, in truth, kind and affectionate, was painfully struck and touched. One of the fellow officers of the young lord informed him that Henri de Castelneau, having certainly exposed himself unnecessarily, had been killed, evidently in consequence of such rashness; and the count was led to believe that his death might be owing to disappointment and despair. He became apprehensive of seeing his daughter; he remained with the army for months after his presence was no longer wanting; and he only returned when he heard that Louise had been extremely ill, and that the health of her elder sister was now failing rapidly.

In earlier and happier days, Louise had never imagined that the absence of her father could be anything but sorrowful to her; but circumstances had altered those feelings, and she had many an occasion to thank Heaven that he was away so long. The death of her husband, the birth of her child, even if the actual facts could have been hidden from her father, produced emotions and were succeeded by consequences which must have been discovered. Grief, and apprehension, and agony of mind, well nigh deprived

her of her senses; and it was long ere her sister could teach her to put a needful guard upon her lips. At length, however, her father was satisfied, as he was prompt and decided, though not in reality severe or unkind; on finding the health of both his children so greatly impaired, he caused them to be removed from Paris with a degree of unnecessary quickness which agitated poor Louise much, and gave her no opportunity of communicating with the wife of good Pierre Morin, under whose charge her sister had placed the child. Agitation, apprehension, and sympathy for poor Louise, had shaken Mademoiselle d'Argencerre, and accelerated the disease under which she suffered. She bore up well, indeed; for her sister's sake, till the arrival of her father; but from that time her health rapidly declined, and in less than two months she was no more.

It was during this latter period that the events occurred which have been narrated in the commencement of this book, and which placed Annette under the charge and guidance of the Abbé de Castelneau. It may be sufficient to add that both Pierre Morin and his wife had deceived themselves in regard to the real mother of Annette. The rumour had at first been so strong, that the elder sister was to be married to the young Lord of Castelneau, that it had even reached the ears of the good artisan and his family, as well as those of the Abbé de Castelneau; and when the filigree-worker was told vaguely of a secret marriage, and the absolute necessity of concealing the birth of the child, he naturally supposed that Mademoiselle d'Argencerre was the mother. When he heard of her death, he hesitated not, as we have shown, to confide the infant to the care of the Abbé de Castelneau, finding, that the money which he had received was all spent, and that the poor child was likely to suffer the same penury which had fallen upon himself and his wife. He was soon undeceived, however, after the return of Annette's mother to Paris; but far from reproaching him, she applauded what he had done, having known the abbé well in happier days, and having discovered, amidst many failings and many errors, traits of a strong mind and a noble heart. Directed by her, Pierre Morin made inquiries into the circumstances of Monsieur de Castelneau; and she it was who furnished him secretly with the means of paying his most pressing debts and quitting the capital.

"And now, my dear friend and relation," she said, laying her hand upon that of the count, "again accept my thanks, my deepest and most heartfelt thanks, for the care you have taken of this beloved child, and for the wisdom you have shown in her education. I must henceforth claim my rank as Countess of Castelneau; but Annette, so long as you live, will never demand anything but the dear name of your adopted daughter. Till the death of the late king, of which event you, of course, have heard, I ventured not to avow my marriage, because he had strongly interested himself in one who had sought a hand which could not be given to him, and had resented my refusal so vehemently that he forbade my presence at the court. A week ago, however, I presented myself to the gentle and kind-hearted monarch who now rules over us. He showed him the contract which had lain concealed for many years

in my chamber at Castelnau; and I produced the register of the marriage, which had been procured for me by my good friend Monsieur Morin here. The whole was at once recognised as legal by the king, and I hastened towards this place with all speed, to set the mind of every one at rest. Say, Annette; say, my dear child, whether you do not feel as I do, and whether it will not be joy to you to see Monsieur de Castelnau, who has been a father to you, still acting as a father to all around him?"

"My dear lady," replied the Count de Castelnau, "I never was ambitious; I never was avaricious; I must not say that I never was unjust; for every man who acts ill and unwisely in life is doubly unjust to others and to himself. But I cannot retain what is not my own; these fair lands and lordships belong to my Annette. They are hers, not mine, and most willingly —"

Annette rose from her seat, and gliding quietly up to him, dropped upon her knees, and laid her hands on his, looking up in his face with a glance of tenderness and affection unspeakable. Ernest de Nogent advanced likewise, and bent one knee beside her, saying, "We entreat you, we beseech you, never mention such a thing again."

The count clasped their hands in his, and lifted his eyes towards heaven, as if thanking God for some intense delight.

At that instant, however, as if some wild and sudden emotion had seized him, he started up, cast himself between Annette and the wood on the opposite side of the water, and threw his arms partly over her, and partly round Ernest. At the very same instant there was the loud and ringing report of a carbine. The count staggered forward, reeled up again, and fell back upon the grass. Annette clasped her hands, raising almost frantic in his face; but the sword of Ernest de Nogent sprang from the sheath in an instant; with one bound he was across the stream, and ere Pierre Morin could follow, his blade was crossed with that of the Baron de Cajare. Stern and deadly enmity was in both their faces, and the play of their weapons one against the other seemed like the quick glances of the lightning.

Pierre Morin paused, for they were two men not to be separated with life, and at the fifth pass the sword of the Baron de Cajare glided over the shoulder of Ernest de Nogent, while Ernest's hilt struck against his adversary's side, and the bright blade shone out under his left arm.

Ernest de Nogent shook him from his weapon, and cast him back upon the ground, exclaiming, "Base villain, thou wilt do no more wrong."

"Curses! curses! curses upon you!" murmured the Baron de Cajare, and with those words upon his lips the fierce eyes lost their eagerness, and swam in death.

Ernest gazed upon him only for a moment, thrusting his sword back into the sheath; and, while Pierre Morin moralised in his peculiar manner, saying, "This is the consequence of kings interfering with the punishment of criminals," the young gentleman sprang across the stream again, and joined the horrified group around the Count de Castelnau.

He lightly raised the dying nobleman in his arms, and the count

recognised, and thanked him for the pressure of the hand, but life was ebbing fast. "It is over, Ernest," he said, in a low voice. "Annette, my child, I am happy, most happy. I have died for thee, for one, I have died to save thee. Let me lean my eyes upon thy shoulder where they will close in joy, to open again, I trust, on my Redeemer in heaven!"

He bent down his brow; it rested on Annette's bosom; the weight became heavier and more heavy; his grasp relaxed upon the hand of Ernest de Nogent, and the young nobleman gently laid the corpse back upon the grass.

